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TRESSIDER'S SISTER

A NOVEL

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

BENZIGER BROTHERS

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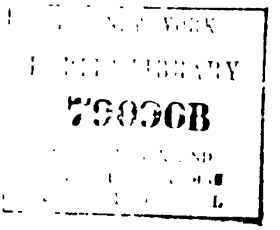

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TRESSIDER'S SISTER

CHAPTER I

MRS. CORBY ENTERTAINS A VISITOR

MRS. CORBY was sitting alone in her London drawing-room towards the close of a bleak winter's day. Fog in the early morning had drifted grudgingly away to give place to a chilly rain that rapidly converted the streets to slime. She could hear the rain pattering against the windows, and splashing heavily on the big bare plane-trees in the Square. The sound disturbed her. She was a woman who liked stillness and silence when she was alone. But although she had neither husband nor children she was not often alone. She was too sympathetic to be permitted to enjoy much solitude. She was waiting for someone now, and from time to time she glanced a little anxiously at the clock as if she were afraid that the weather might deter them from coming.

The period of this history belongs to the first decade of the twentieth century, a time so apparently remote, so divided from the present by such monstrous and cruel and incredible changes, that it would indeed seem to many as if the intervening years must number at least a hundred. It was a comfortable as well as a luxurious age, and people perhaps felt that any change which might come could only produce a higher degree of comfort, a more determined and universal luxury. There were many houses in those days that struck the same note of permanence and security which a casual visitor could have observed in Mrs. Corby's drawing-room that afternoon.

Seen thus in repose Mrs. Corby's face had lost little of the singular beauty for which in her youth she had been famous. Her hair was snow-white but it was still thick and abundant; she wore it parted in soft waves. Her eyes, as nearly black as English eyes ever are, were brilliant and very intelligent. She counted nearly sixty years, but her complexion still had the delicacy of old ivory. She possessed something of the sober and dignified charm which characterized her room, and made it different from the fashionable drawing-rooms of the London of that day.

Her marriage had given her exactly the kind of life she preferred, and perhaps not many women can say that. It was what she had dreamed of as a girl in the apple-orchards of her Cornish home. Mark Corby had seen Cynthia Tressider for the first time among those same orchards in spring, with the rosy foam of blossom drifting above her head against a sky quite sharply blue, and with the emerald grass at her feet. He had married her in the quick sudden way in which throughout his life he accomplished all his most important work. Not six weeks later she had started, a young bride, for Italy. A student and a clever writer he had always gathered about him men of keen intellect and original thought—he had been dead about ten years, but Mrs. Corby, who had been in love with him to the end, could still often fancy that she heard his quiet footstep upon the stairs. It would never have surprised or alarmed her if he had suddenly entered the room. . .

They had never had children, and after her husband's death she had interested herself in the son and daughter of her younger brother, who had died in India not long before Mark. Their mother, Mrs. Harold Tressider, had been an ill-balanced woman for whom Mrs. Corby had never had much sym-

pathy. The only thing she could say in her praise was that she had conscientiously brought up her two younger children in her husband's Faith, he having become a Catholic during his residence in India. But Mrs. Tressider's whole devotion had been concentrated upon her elder son, Hubert. She had never cared greatly for Harold nor had she ever tried to understand him. When he died Hubert was grown up, and the two younger children, a girl and a boy, were just old enough to be sent to school. As long as their mother was alive Mrs. Corby had never been allowed to see much of them, but after her death which had taken place three years before, they had generally made their home with their aunt for the greater part of their holidays. Hubert was so much their senior that people often erroneously supposed him to be the offspring of a former marriage. He possessed many of his mother's less agreeable qualities among which could be numbered a certain jealous dislike of his aunt, Mrs. Corby, and as far as possible he endeavored to thwart any plans she might wish to make for Audrey and Ninian, to both of whom she was extremely devoted.

Neither Hubert nor his mother had ever seemed quite human to Mrs. Corby, who was a loving as well as a generous woman, and could not understand the mentality that can envy the superior comfort and well-being of another. Hubert had, however, inherited the business and wealth of a maternal uncle, when he was still a struggling and rather unsuccessful young man. He now spent his life in Millborough, a northern manufacturing town, and was seldom seen in London. Just lately he had been annoying Mrs. Corby by trying to induce Audrey to go and live with him. The girl, hardly yet twenty, had been abroad travelling with friends for a considerable time, and Ninian had joined her whenever he could.

But she had returned now to her aunt's house, and Mrs. Corby wished her to remain there at any rate until she married. Ninian had so far not formed any precise plans for his future, although it was understood that he was to go to Oxford. He was a year younger than Audrey. His own inclinations were all for an outdoor life, spent in some lonely spot in the West, with Audrey to keep house for him. They were passionately attached to each other. Mrs. Corby always listened sympathetically when these youthful ambitions were unfolded to her though in her heart she was convinced that her niece with her real beauty and charm would have a very different career.

She was thinking of them both to-night when the door opened and Sir Myles Dorling was announced. A man entered the room and came quickly, almost eagerly, towards her. He was tall, fair and sunburned, with eyes of a strange, bright blue that rested upon her with a keen, penetrating look.

"You're late, Myles," she said; "I began to be afraid you weren't coming. My two have gone off to the play together. Some new thing at the 'Court.'"

He sat down near the fire.

"Yes—I'm afraid I'm awfully late," he said, "but I was kept in the City. There are still such thousands of things to see to. And I'm not nearly ready."

Mrs. Corby rang for tea. When it was brought in she gave him a cup. She thought he looked a little tired and depressed, as many people do on the eve of a journey. She was aware that he was anxious, for he had recently confided to her the reason of that anxiety. During the last few weeks his hopes had centered themselves upon her niece, Audrey Tressider. Mrs. Corby was delighted to think that he wished to marry her, but she, too, was doubtful of his success. And Myles, perhaps for the first time

in his life, was feeling timid, uncertain, afraid to venture further.

Up to the present he had had a singularly successful career. His luck had been almost proverbial, and his work conducted chiefly in remote parts of Africa had given him those critical moments in which a man must display such talents and initiative as he possesses, or forfeit forever the confidence of his fellows.

When those critical moments had come to Myles they had always found him *à la hauteur*. At thirty-four he had arrived and had merited the rewards so liberally bestowed upon him.

There was an expression upon his face this evening that appealed to her in a special manner. She had often seen it upon the faces of men who had not disappointed her, who had accomplished the thing they had set out to do, and had not turned back in the face of appalling difficulty. With Myles Dorling it meant a task to be accomplished, a woman to be won. She rejoiced to think that the woman was her own niece. . .

"You will never forgive me," he said abruptly, putting down his cup, "but I can't put off the confession any longer."

"Why, what has happened?" inquired Mrs. Corby. A vague alarm seized her.

"Ninian has been at me about it for the past month. I yielded at last, principally because I saw his heart was simply set upon it. But I won't take any responsibility. He is far too young—" He broke off, and rising stood there with his back to the fire, looking very tall and determined.

"You have yielded? What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Corby, nervously. She had no idea what he was talking about, nor had she ever seen him in that kind of mood before.

"Ninian is coming with me to East Africa. He

declares that he will come 'on his own' whether I take him or not. I would far rather he stayed at home and went to Oxford. That is your wish I know. But of course he has his own money and nothing can stop him!" The resentful note in his voice deepened.

"He can't possibly go. He is far too young," said Mrs. Corby, with decision. She felt capable of persuading Ninian to give up so mad a scheme. All very well for Myles, an older man, a seasoned traveller, inured to hardship and the evils of climate. Ninian was a slender, delicate creature, very like his father, with a spirit far too great for his fragile body.

"If you could only prevent him I should be eternally obliged to you," said Myles with a touch of irony. "I do not think however that you will have any more success than I have had. There is a new spirit at work among the young. They make up their minds to do a thing and we older ones are powerless to stop them!"

"Audrey will use her influence," said Mrs. Corby. "Has he mentioned it to her?"

"He hasn't told anyone. But all this week he's been quietly getting his kit. Miss Tressider will have to know, and I can't imagine how she will take it. She's perfectly wrapped up in him. Directly I consented, I felt it would ruin what little chance I had with her!"

"And you," she said gently, "you have said nothing to her yet? About your own hopes, I mean?"

There was something very maternal in her face as she looked at Myles just then. She had known him since he was a boy, and he had always been very dear to her.

"No," he said, "but I might do so this evening if you think the moment propitious."

"You must stay and dine, of course, and then you

will see her. They went off to this matinée in the most tearing spirits. Myles . . it is the wish of my heart." She put out her hand and he grasped it.

"And of mine," he said gravely. His eyes burnt as if with an inward flame. As he spoke he turned away and examined a photograph that stood on a little table near him. It represented a quite young girl, fancifully attired in a white dress with a pale scarf floating about her head, against a background of trailing ivy. She had dark hair, and her eyes were long and dark, rather like Mrs. Corby's. For Audrey was a Tressider, every inch of her. She had nothing of her mother. Hubert seemed to have absorbed all possible likeness to that side of the family.

"I'm so afraid that it may go against you—this plan of taking Ninian with you," she said.

"I am pretty certain that it will!"

"And supposing anything were to happen to him? He isn't strong you know."

"She could hardly blame me for that," he said, with a touch of bitterness. "I have done my best to dissuade him."

"He has taken such a great fancy to you," said Mrs. Corby, "I have never known him so attracted by anyone before. You are his hero. And, of course, the prospect of adventure is fascinating when one is nineteen."

"By the way, I never told you my plans were changed. I am to start early in the week," said Myles.

Her face fell. "So soon? That'll make it all the worse for Audrey, if she's had no kind of preparation."

He almost wrung his hands. "Don't I know it all? But I assure you I'm not to blame! I liked the boy—we were friends, and then he sprang this

hideous surprise upon me. I was utterly taken aback. You see his idea is that he'll settle out there —grow coffee or something—and spend the rest of his time in big-game shooting. And, of course, his sister is to join him. None of his dreams seems to be complete without her."

"And for the present I do hope she will stay with me," she said.

"Why, I thought that was settled," he exclaimed, in some surprise.

Mrs. Corby cleared her throat.

"Nothing is ever quite settled with such a man as Hubert in the family. He is trying to detach her —to induce her to go to Millborough," she said, after a slight pause.

"You won't let that happen I hope," said Myles. His forehead was puckered into fine lines.

"I am powerless," said Mrs. Corby, "just as powerless as I am to stop Ninian from going with you. Hubert is really their guardian, though he has so far taken very little notice of them. I don't know what has induced him to invite Audrey there now, to keep house for him."

"To keep house for him? In Millborough?" repeated Myles, in dismay. "I hope she will have the good sense not to go. I should think it was a most undesirable spot!"

"So it is," agreed Mrs. Corby, "but Audrey has a strong sense of duty, and if she takes it into her head that it's her duty to go there, she will certainly go."

Myles sat down again near the fire and stared into the glowing flames.

"She is very young, of course," he said meditatively," but I think it would give me double strength for this expedition if I knew I were coming back to her in the end."

His trip was not to be made for mere purposes of pleasure only. He was to inquire into certain conditions of native labour, and to survey a large tract of land for Government purposes. Being an Englishman, he was naturally going to combine sport with business.

"'A little fame that she might wear it in her hat?'" she quoted mockingly.

His face relaxed. "We only met a month ago," he said slowly, "it was odd I'd never come across her here. And neither of us had ever stayed with the Grazebrooks before. It is a strange house—almost too modern for me. I felt like an old fogey." He smiled.

"Old? At thirty-four?" she said, with a smile.

"They are so absurdly young—the Grazebrooks. Very kind-hearted, but unconventional."

"I have always been sorry for Mrs. Standen that she should have two such daughters as Gertrude Grazebrook and Evangeline," said Mrs. Corby reflectively, "I was not particularly anxious for Audrey to be intimate with either of them."

"Miss Standen was not there. I believe she even succeeds in astonishing Mrs. Grazebrook!"

"She would astonish most people," remarked Mrs. Corby, with some dryness.

"The Standens live not very far from Millborough," said Miles; "of course, if she goes there she will be continually seeing them."

"I am going to fight against it," said Mrs. Corby with unusual resolution. "I shall not let her go without a struggle, because I don't consider it would be at all a happy thing for her."

She rose and went to her writing-table and took up a letter. Then she came back to her chair near the fire.

"I will read you what Hubert says. This letter came to-day,—I have not shown it to Audrey yet. Would you like to hear it?"

"Immensely," said Myles. Everything that concerned Miss Tressider was just then of the deepest interest to him. And he would have preferred to picture her here in Mrs. Corby's house while he was away.

"I am sometimes afraid that I don't do Hubert justice," she said, "but, really, he always seems to me to be half fish and half serpent. I think I am afraid of him. And he is so extraordinarily like his mother. You know he is not a Catholic like the two children. Harold's conversion only took place when he was nearly grown up." She began to read the letter aloud in unconscious imitation of Hubert's precise and rather pedantic manner. "'With regard to your kind offer that Audrey should make her home with you for the future, I can only say that she is now of an age to choose for herself. I do not approve of coercion. As far as money is concerned my brother and sister are already independent, although they do not come into the full possession of their little fortunes until they are twenty-one. I believe that although I am nominally their guardian I should never take it upon myself to advise either of them, unless it were upon a very grave matter, such as might affect the honour of our family and name. Such a thing as an imprudent engagement, or a marriage contemplated with an undesirable person, would alone lead me to use the power I possess over them. To return to Audrey. I believe that she has both intelligence and will. My mother used to tell me that she was both self-willed and obstinate when she had set heart upon a certain course as a child. Presumably, therefore, she knows what will suit her best, and if she obeys her natural instinct

and comes to live with me, as I hope she will, I shall do all I can to give her a comfortable home. Millborough is not in itself a desirable locality from a social point of view, but, no doubt, Audrey will find plenty of home occupations to amuse and interest her. I know several of the Roman Catholics hereabouts, and Lady Ince, who is an old friend of mine, lives in the country about five miles away. On the other hand, if Audrey prefers to disregard my prior claim, and elects to make her home with you in London, I can only thank you again for what I know was an invitation prompted by kindness."

With a little gesture of impatience she flung the letter down upon the table beside her.

"That is Hubert all over," she declared, "he is as unlike Ninian and Audrey as he can possibly be. Of course, he is a great deal older; he was sixteen when my poor sister-in-law surprised everyone by having these two babies. I am told that Hubert has never cared for anyone in his life except his mother; they were all in all to each other. She was wrapped up in him, and did not care for the two little ones in the least."

"I only wish he would use his influence to try to stop Ninian from coming with me," said Myles.

"I wish he would. But Ninian is self-willed and obstinate, too. And if he has set his heart on it. . . ."

"Has Miss Tressider ever been to Millborough?" asked Myles suddenly.

"No, never, I believe. She and Ninian always went to school abroad and I think they hardly ever came home in the holidays. My sister-in-law generally took them to Switzerland. I think she did so because she didn't want me to know them. If Audrey does choose to go there, I am afraid it will be a dismal surprise to her."

She had hardly finished speaking when the door was flung open to admit two figures. They came in eagerly, still laughing and talking. Their gaiety subsided suddenly at seeing that their aunt was not alone. But when they had both kissed her with an enthusiastic affection they turned to greet Myles, who was standing there feeling a trifle out of it. They were such children, so unconscious, so charmingly gay and youthful. Despite his thirty-four years he had never felt as if his boyhood were so very far away. But looking down upon the two Tressiders he felt oddly old and staid.

Ninian greeted him eagerly, with that touch of respectful hero-worship which characterized his attitude towards him, and Audrey, gravely, with something of coldness. He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful before. She was dressed in brown, with dark brown furs coming up close to her slim long throat. She was tall and slightly made, and moved with a certain girlish grace. Her hair was almost black, and showed darkly against the pure pale line of her forehead, growing close and thick. She had eyes of a very dark brown,—the brown of deep and still forest pools. As they rested upon Myles now, they seemed to hold an almost unfathomable mystery.

The boy who stood by her side was a slim stripling, much taller even than his sister, with a small, brown face lit by a pair of enthusiastic dark eyes. They were almost strikingly alike, except that there was something fragile in Ninian's aspect which his sister did not possess. She was his senior by a year.

Audrey turned away from Myles and looked at Ninian with a kind of yearning tenderness that was almost maternal. Myles intercepted the glance, and came to the swift and accurate conclusion that Ninian had told her of the contemplated expedition.

CHAPTER II

THE TRESSIDERS

MYLES DORLING had, after all, no opportunity of speaking alone to Audrey Tressider that night. Even *he* felt that the moment was little less than auspicious, for she was seemingly absorbed in Ninian as if the knowledge of their coming separation had suddenly made this brother, to whom she was so openly and unaffectedly devoted, a thing of increasedly precious worth. That attitude of hers, which struck him to-night as the most salient quality she possessed, also contrived to make the distance between himself and her infinitely, tragically greater. There were moments in the drawing-room after dinner when he felt himself quite absurdly *de trop*, as far as the brother and sister were concerned. Mrs. Corby noticed it too, and tried with unfailing tact to fill the gap, hoping perhaps that he did not feel it too much. But Myles was far too much in love not to be acutely sensitive on the point. He even felt a little jealous of Ninian, who could so easily, and without apparent effort, make her eyes change so swiftly from grave to gay. He, however, scarcely yet realized how empty their lives had been of affection except for this great devotion to each other.

His few remaining days in England were not to be spent in London, and he knew that opportunities of seeing Audrey again would probably be scarce and inadequate. He was to start for Scotland on the following morning to pay a farewell visit to his mother and sisters. As an only son he could not forego this duty, although his long absences had contrived to make him feel a little out of touch with his home surroundings. His sisters, all older than

himself, were thin, angular, bony women, with scanty hair of faded flaxen, who had not attempted to defeat the onslaughts of approaching age. They considered that Myles had now done enough for his country, and they were fond of urging him to come and settle down at home and look after his properity. But Myles, the vagrant, the wanderer, had no taste for such a quiet life. When he married. . . . As these thoughts came into his mind, reviving the strange impatient irritability with which he had always met his sisters' suggestions, he glanced across the room at Audrey. Yes, with such a wife as that the process of settling down might conceivably possess something that was definitely attractive. She would hold him, stimulate him; he would no longer wish to escape to the ends of the earth. He would want to stay near her, always near her. Never out of his sight . . . that was how he would wish to keep her.

Mrs. Corby's gentle musical voice broke across these fantastic imaginings.

"They are such children, aren't they?" she said. "They don't want anything but each other. And yet some day," she added with a touch of bitterness, "there will be a man for her and a woman for him, and they will, perhaps, even forget their great devotion."

"I do not think she would be one to forget," said Myles slowly.

They both looked at Audrey.

"You must keep her here," said Myles suddenly, remembering their conversation of the afternoon, "you must persuade her not to go to Millborough. I don't know why it is, but I feel that she wouldn't be happy there, and perhaps having put her hand to the plough she mightn't like to turn back."

"I will do my best to keep her here," Mrs. Corby assured him.

He rose to go, and when he had said good-bye to her and Audrey he went downstairs, followed by Ninian. The boy looked excited and nervous. His thin, brown face was flushed.

"I've told my sister," he said eagerly, "of course, she's a bit cut up about it. Women always make a fuss, don't they?" His dark eyes scrutinized Myles with a certain whimsical curiosity. His nature was obviously more simple and frank than his sister's. "And, of course, we've been such tremendous pals. We've always stuck together—I daresay Aunt Cynthia has told you?"

"She has told me a little," said Myles guardedly. "But I advise you to think the matter over very carefully. You're rather young for this sort of thing—Mrs. Corby still wants you to go to Oxford. I think myself you're making a mistake."

Ninian's face fell.

"Oh, I thought we'd thrashed that out thoroughly the other day," he said, a trifle impatiently. "One mustn't listen to a lot of women. They always want a fellow to sit still at home and do just the humdrum things everyone does! I daresay you've found that out yourself?"

Myles smiled grimly. "But there's a slight difference between your age and mine. I'd taken my degree at Oxford before I made my first trip."

"But this is such a chance," said Ninian, "why, I may never get another like it. It will be simply topping going with you. All my pals are frightfully envious of my luck. I couldn't give it up now. Not for you or Aunt Cynthia or even for Audrey!"

"Then there is no more to be said," said Myles, struggling into his great-coat. "I've told Mrs. Corby I'll take no responsibility in the matter. You're coming against my advice—against the advice, too, of all those who care for you." He looked down at Ninian sternly.

"Oh, that's all right," said the boy carelessly. "I'm pretty game you know, I shan't let you down by being ill or anything. You needn't ever worry about me. Leave all the worrying to Aunt Cynthia and Audrey." His laughter pealed out, high, nervous, excitable.

"I'm sorry your sister minds so much," said Myles slowly. He had a vague impulse at that moment to confide something of his hopes to Ninian. But Tressider's youth deterred him. He was not enough of a man to receive a man's confidence. He was unusually undeveloped and irresponsible for his nineteen years. Myles checked the impulse resolutely.

"Audrey's a darling of course," said Ninian, "I'm fonder of her than of anyone in the world. You see my mother didn't care particularly for either of us. We were left a good deal to each other. It sounds absurd to say so when you think Audrey's only just a year older than I am, but she really has been rather like a mother to me. I tell her things. That's why I told her about going with you. She . . . she cried a little. She seemed to blame you at first, but I explained it wasn't your doing at all. I think she has forgiven you now."

He lifted his shining dark eyes to Dorling's face.

"I'm glad of that," said Myles with a touch of irony. "I shouldn't like her to think it was my fault."

He made a step towards the door, but Ninian slipped past him and threw it open. The night was still wet, and the pavements were dark with rain. A cab slopped past, flinging up dingy spray from the puddles. The street lamps were reflected in the wet road as if it had been a stream.

"It's still raining. Won't you have a cab?" said Ninian.

Myles shook his head and turned up the collar of his coat.

"No, I'll walk, thanks," he said, and with a final farewell he strode out into the gloom of the streets and was swiftly swallowed up in the shadows.

Ninian shut the door and went thoughtfully upstairs. Dorling had not been quite himself to-night; he was in a queer mood. Almost as if he repented having promised to take him on this expedition. He had looked so odd, too, when he heard that about Audrey. Perhaps he wasn't used to girls, didn't know that they often cried at quite little things. Not that Audrey was one to cry often. It was only natural that *she* shouldn't want him to go. She had said that he was all she had in the world. That was all rot, of course! She had, or rather was going to have, Hubert. She would have no end of a time if she really went to keep house for Hubert at Millborough. They didn't know him awfully well, but their mother had thought all the world of him. Sometimes they had been rather fed up with the praise and admiration she used to bestow upon him. In any case, Audrey would be quite happy. He went back to the drawing-room.

"Has Myles only just gone?" said Mrs. Corby, looking up from her work. She possessed great skill in embroidering and was seldom without a needle in her hand.

"Yes, just," said Ninian. "Did it strike you he was in a queer mood to-night?"

Mrs. Corby glanced up quickly.

"Queer?" she said.

"Partly about my going with him. He wanted me to think better of it. You see I was fool enough to tell him that Audrey didn't like the idea."

"As if I *could* like it," said Audrey, "when I shan't see you for a whole year!"

She rose, put her arm around Ninian's neck with a gesture of complete confidence. He did not attempt to draw away from this embrace, but turning towards her dropped a light kiss on her forehead.

"He did look odd," he said reflectively, "almost as if he were a little 'soft' about you, Audrey. And, of course, that's impossible!"

Audrey drew her arm away and let it drop quickly to her side. The hot scarlet mounted to her face. Ninian was putting into words something that had first struck her when she was staying with the Grazebrooks. Some jesting remark of Beatrice Grazebrook's echoed in her ears. "You seem to have made quite a conquest, you demure little thing!" She had felt shy of meeting him afterwards, had even feared the jest might have reached him. And now Ninian! . . .

"I should give you both my blessing!" continued Ninian lightly. "It would be ripping to have such a brother-in-law as that! I'd like frightfully to keep him in the family." He laughed, but Audrey stood there, silent, confused.

"I wish you wouldn't be so absurd," she said at last. "Sir Myles is years older than we are. It isn't likely that he could ever be 'soft' about me as you say."

"Men of his age generally marry girls of twenty," observed Ninian with the calm wisdom of youth. "Anyhow you'd be jolly lucky to get him."

He went up to Audrey and kissed her, aware that he had offended her. "Good-night," he said, "I'm off to bed. I've got an awful lot to do to-morrow."

It was not long before Audrey said good-night to Mrs. Corby and went up to her room. Ninian's words had excited and alarmed her. She felt certain that they held something of truth. She had been aware that Myles's eyes had sometimes rested upon

her with an expression that was at once grave and tender and rather wistful. She had liked him at first. During that noisy week at the Grazebrooks' they had often sought silence in each other's company. But now, viewed as the person who intended to rob her of Ninian, she felt that she did not like him at all. That was altogether too high a price to pay for the pleasure of his friendship. She felt that she could not let Ninian go so far away, to meet unknown perils. He was too young, too reckless. If she could only speak to Myles Dorling quite alone she might perhaps dissuade him from letting Ninian accompany him.

Ninian didn't realize how tremendously she would miss him. He believed that she would be perfectly happy with Hubert at Millborough. She hadn't, of course, made up her mind definitely to go there, and as she looked at the future now, it seemed to be a little obscure. She wanted her life to be a beautiful thing, and hitherto she had always felt that it rested with herself, more or less, to make it so. But with Ninian far away, things no longer appeared to be quite so easy. And she hardly knew Hubert; she had never seen Millborough. . . .

She looked round the room. It was large and comfortable, lit by electric light, arranged in old gilt sconces, and by an immense, glowing fire. The things in it were costly as well as comfortable. She could stay here, of course, and at that moment the warmth and security of Mrs. Corby's house did actually seem to hold out welcoming hands to her. On the other hand Hubert had given her to understand that her duty lay with him. She could "keep house" for him. There were duties and occupations waiting for her at Millborough. He did not actually specify them, and his letter lacked warmth and cordiality as well as affection. Audrey began to wonder what her life

would be like if she went to live with this unknown brother in Millborough. With Ninian away. . . That thought hurt her. And it awoke anew that curious anger she had felt to-day against Myles Dorling. It was his fault, it was his doing. He should have utterly refused Ninian's request. He must have seen what a boy he was, eager, impulsive. The final decision had lain with him and he had yielded. Audrey felt that she could never forgive him for yielding.

It was all nonsense, of course, that silly speech Ninian had made to-night. For if Myles Dorling had cared about her, even the fraction of a hair's breadth, he would never have hurt her like this. He must have seen how devoted she was to her brother, and in a lesser degree, how devoted Ninian was to her. He could hardly have been blind to their mutual affection. Yet he had deliberately told Ninian that he might accompany him to Africa. It was very cruel of him. To Audrey, there seemed to be something inhuman and ruthless about this action. It was like tearing the boy away from his own family, and exposing him to unnecessary hardships, perils, and privations. And Ninian wasn't strong. Although he would never acknowledge it, he easily got tired.

But they were to start early in the following week. There was very little time to effect any change of plan. And Ninian had set his heart upon going. He would be angry with her if she ventured to say a word of remonstrance to Sir Myles.

And at the back of her thoughts—kept securely there for the most part because she feared to examine it too closely—there was the little dread that Ninian had spoken the truth about Myles's attitude towards herself.

CHAPTER III

A REFUSAL

MRS. CORBY always said that there was one man in the world whom she had failed signally to understand, and that man was her nephew, Hubert Tressider. He seldom came to see her even when he was in London, which happened but rarely, and when he did so he felt as much out of place amid her little coterie as it was possible for a man to feel among his fellows. And when he did pay these rare formal calls upon her at discreet intervals, she was conscious of something antagonistic, even actually hostile, between them. She had sometimes tried to analyze it, and then had come to the conclusion that his mother had imbued him with a certain jealous dislike of her husband's people, and that there was something hereditary in this sentiment which he scarcely tried to conceal. Yet he rarely disagreed with her, or allowed their mutual communications to extend beyond those of mere cool acquaintanceship, although he never quitted her presence without conveying to her in the most unmistakeable way his complete disapproval of her, her mode of life, and her friends.

But the opportunity had now come when he was placed in a position to oppose her deliberately. She had seen from the first that he intended to make full use of it. He was determined to detach Audrey from her care, to take the girl away to Millborough. Their two wills had never before come into open conflict, and Mrs. Corby felt pretty certain that she would suffer defeat. Audrey had tacitly ranged herself upon her brother's side. This was more evident after she had learnt that Ninian intended to

accompany Sir Myles Dorling to Africa. The announcement of this had been a sharp blow to her, for she loved her younger brother dearly. She felt the need of replacing Ninian, of forming other interests, and the idea of being of use to Hubert especially attracted her, and inclined her to listen to his appeal. The remembrance of his house, a huge stucco villa on the outskirts of Millborough and now almost incorporated with that growing town, filled Mrs. Corby with something of dismay. It had been built in the early sixties by Hubert's uncle, and decorated about the same time in a manner which the dutiful nephew had scarcely altered at all. He had merely added modern necessaries in the shape of electric light and adequate bath-rooms. He was a very busy man, ambitious, self-centred, with a curious desire to make money without any accompanying intention of spending it. Brought up as a poor man, he had inherited wealth rather fortuitously, since his uncle had lost his only son in an accident, and had made Hubert heir in his place. He personally supervised the works, of which he was the owner. Audrey would be left very much to herself if she decided to go and live with Hubert. And when she was not alone she would be little likely to see the kind of people whom it was desirable for her to know. Lady Ince lived too far off to be of much use. Mrs. Standen, another neighbor, was too much absorbed in her own health and in the unconventional conduct of her two daughters to spare a great deal of time for Audrey. Mrs. Corby had little of the snob in her, but she knew that twenty is a highly impressionable age at which it is easy to form ideals and to lose them. She did not want Audrey to part with her ideals just yet. And she had set her heart upon her marrying Myles Dorling. He had fallen in love with her almost at first sight. The marriage

seemed to be almost an ideal one. Myles was not a Catholic, but he would be certain to make and keep all the necessary promises. If only he had not been going away it might have taken place very soon. . .

In the days that followed, Mrs. Corby hoped against hope that something would happen to prevent Audrey from going to Millborough. But the stars in their courses fought against her. Hubert was urgent, and wrote frequently to his sister. He seemed to waive aside as negligible the slight claim of Mrs. Corby. Her hopes now became centred upon Myles. If Audrey accepted him there was no doubt that he would be able to prevail upon her to remain in London. He shared Mrs. Corby's horror of a Millborough environment for Audrey.

Myles returned from Scotland at the end of the week. In his heart he was glad to get back to London. Fate threw Audrey across his path on the day of his arrival, just as he was turning his face eastward to call upon Mrs. Corby.

He met the brother and sister walking together along Oxford Street. They were going to get a breath of fresh air in the Park, they informed him. The December day was bright and cloudless; there was a keen nip in the wind. Both young faces were bright and glowing with the sharp, cold air, the brisk exercise.

It may have been that Ninian as an onlooker saw most of the game, for not many minutes had elapsed before he made some excuse for leaving them. He would go on by himself, he said, Audrey needn't worry about him. As Sir Myles was going to see Mrs. Corby, Audrey could walk back with him. He swung off, leaving them alone together, and thereby earning the gratitude of Myles. But Audrey watched her brother's retreating figure rather wistfully. They had planned this walk together, and she felt

hurt that Ninian should go off so calmly, leaving her in the lurch. He was often a little careless in his relations to other people, not always fulfilling engagements or promises, but he had rarely failed her before.

Suddenly, remembering all that Ninian had said the other night, she believed that he had acted now of deliberate purpose. A little hot sense of anger crept into her heart. If Myles were to speak to her now she felt that she would not easily be able to forgive Ninian for offering him this opportunity of doing so. And something in Myles Dorling's set, almost stern face, assured her that a critical moment was approaching. . .

"Are you sure you want to walk all the way?" he asked.

"Yes. I like walking in this frosty weather."

Myles who was accustomed to hot climates disliked the winter; it made him feel shrivelled and old. Very old when judged by the youth and vigour that now walked so swiftly beside him. It was true, perhaps, that there was too great a difference in their respective ages. Fourteen years. . . But lots of marriages turned out very happily with an even greater disparity. . . . It wasn't, either, that she was too young in years. Only she had a trick of looking like Youth incarnate.

Afterwards he felt that fate had lured him on through easy primrose paths to a swift disaster. For Audrey had her own dreams of love; dreams that were still utterly unrealized. She had never even imagined herself to be in love, and was perfectly certain that she did not care for this strange, stern man who was pleading his cause with an abrupt eloquence that might have moved many women. His direct words needed however a direct answer; and her dark brown eyes met his squarely as she said:

"I don't want to marry . . anyone. I shall keep house for Hubert till Ninian comes back."

"And when Ninian comes back?" he said, with a touch of bitterness. He had felt his loneliness so much in Scotland, had resolved anew never to face a settled life there unless Audrey were by his side. "Won't there be any hope for me when Ninian comes back?"

She shook her head. Against her will his eyes seemed to magnetize her; they made her feel a little afraid of him.

They were in a quiet deserted street near the British Museum when he stopped suddenly and faced her. Her eyes fell under his look. Was she like Ninian, careless of the feelings of others? She had no wish to hurt him, and yet it was inevitable.

"Are you not going to give me any hope, Audrey, —Audrey?" he said, repeating her name with a curious, lingering tenderness.

"I can't give you any hope," she said quickly, walking on a little. "You see I always thought you were interested in Ninian. It didn't occur to me that you liked me, too. We were both glad you were at the Grazebrooks'—we were such strangers there, and I felt more out of it than Ninian did. He always gets on quickly with other people. I felt proud, too, that you should pick him out to go with you, although, of course, I am unhappy at the thought of parting from him. You see, he isn't strong and . . it makes me afraid. . ."

Yes, just as she had been proud that he should pick out Ninian, as she expressed it, so now she felt a little sense of pride that he should have chosen her, should have wished to make her his wife. At the Grazebrooks' she had been aware of his importance, of the pleasure other women took in his society, of the attention that had been paid to him even by such

butterflies as Beatrice and her sister. They would envy her. . . He was rich, celebrated, and charming. She and Ninian had both liked him. But she did not feel old enough nor wise enough to be his wife. She had seen less of life than most girls of her age. It did not seem possible to her that love could come in such prosaic guise, without warning. Perhaps she had dreamed of the sudden swift recognition of twin souls. . . She felt for the first time as if there were something unreasonable, a little unnecessary, in his love for her. She did not want it. She had been happy in her life, in that love for Ninian which was the centre of it. But it was a little difficult to be entirely indifferent to Dorling. There was something very masterful in his personality; almost he seemed to draw her to him against her will. She was half-fascinated, half-repelled. It was all a little incomprehensible, a little disconcerting. He had brought her sharply into contact with things that hitherto had been quite unfamiliar.

He grasped her hand, drawing it all soft and warm from the depths of her sable muff. She *should* listen, she *should* understand. . . She let it lie passively in his. The whole thing was rather like a dream, unreal, impossible.

"Audrey—I could make you care! Won't you trust me? Won't you let me go knowing that I'm coming back to you?"

She drew her hand away from his. "Oh," she said, "you don't seem to understand. While you're away I might meet someone I really cared for, as I suppose I shall care one of these days. Someone who'll be to me just as dear as . . as Ninian. Even a little dearer. . . Then I should be sorry I had made even a half-promise to you!"

This was on the face of it unanswerable, and Myles followed her in silence as she walked down

the street into the Square where Mrs. Corby lived. She did not speak again till they reached the house.

"You'll come in, won't you, and see Aunt Cynthia?"

"Yes," he said. "I want to see her. . ."

They went upstairs together. Mrs. Corby was sitting alone in the drawing-room reading. She gave a little exclamation of surprise as Myles and Audrey came in.

Audrey made some excuse and left them together. She wanted to be alone. She felt excited, a little unnerved. For the first time a man had asked her to be his wife, had offered her his love. People would say that she had been a fool to refuse to marry Myles Dorling. She had rejected a brilliant marriage. If she had accepted him she wondered a little idly if she could have prevented him from going on this expedition with Ninian. She might have prevailed upon them both to remain in England. She wondered why she had not thought of this before. She began to think she had, perhaps, made a mistake. It would have been lovely to feel that she had been the means of preventing Ninian from going. She was so afraid of something happening to him. . .

Downstairs, Mrs. Corby was saying calmly to Myles Dorling:

"I have been defeated, Myles. I don't know if I owe it principally to Audrey or to Hubert, but between them I have undoubtedly suffered the humiliation of a reverse!"

Myles was silent for a few minutes. His features were set, and, seen thus, his face always looked stern.

"And I," he said, "I have also been defeated. You are sure to hear about it sooner or later, and you have been so kind—so sympathetic." . . He broke off abruptly.

"I am very sorry," she said quietly, "when you came in together just now I was afraid that you had spoken. . ."

"She is utterly unconscious!" he declared warmly. "Of course, she is extraordinarily young for her years. She seems to think of no one but Ninian!"

"You mustn't give up hope," said Mrs. Corby gently, "when you come back, perhaps. . . As you say she is very young. She knows nothing of the realities of life."

"Many things may happen before I return. In fact, she was careful to tell me that they might!"

"But you won't give up hope?" she said.

"I never give up hope," he said imperturbably, "you see, I have set my heart upon it. But she wouldn't let me think she could ever change. When I bring Ninian back. . ."

"Ninian?"

He was quick to catch the change in her voice.

"Of course, I shall bring him back!" he said. "Why are you all so dreadfully ready to kill Ninian?" There was a note of impatience that made his voice ring out sharply. His nerves were a little on edge this afternoon. "Those thin wiry boys are often very strong. And you forget it's all his own doing. I utterly disclaim any responsibility!"

"And you are not afraid of what may happen in Audrey's life while you are both away?"

"I *am* afraid," he said more calmly. "Still it will only be for little more than a year. And at Millborough—if she really goes there—she won't be likely to meet anyone."

"She is going there," said Mrs. Corby. "That is what I meant when I told you just now that I had been defeated. She has written to Hubert definitely accepting his offer. She said she would rather go there if Ninian is to be away—she thinks she will

be of use to Hubert. I only hope that she won't be so very unhappy there. It is a horrible place, and Hubert isn't exactly a lively companion for a young girl."

"Millborough is a beastly hole," he remarked. "I was there once, and the impression that remains on my mind is one of endless factory chimneys flinging up dense clouds of black smoke. You could see it—taste it—for miles round. Is she to go soon?"

"Yes, next week, when Ninian has gone. Hubert is rather exultant—I can read between the lines. He seems to think that Lady Ince will look after her when he is too busy. I have known Mary Ince nearly all my life—she is the most pious person I have ever met. She is always in church, always praying. She never goes anywhere."

"I am sure she will be kind to her," said Myles.

He rose to go.

"Won't you stay to tea?" she said.

He shook his head.

"No, not to-day, thanks. It's been very kind of you to let me talk things over with you like this. It's an awful pity, isn't it? I feel that we might have been so happy—she and I. . ."

"I am sorry, too. I should have liked it," said Mrs. Corby. "But I'm not going to give up hope, Myles. You've always been on the winning side. You have got most of the things you wanted. And I can't help thinking that some day you'll win Audrey too."

"I wish I could really think that," he said. He bent down and kissed her hand, foreign-fashion, and then went out of the room. He wished he could have had another glimpse of Audrey, but rightly imagined that as long as he was in the house she would not re-appear.

CHAPTER IV

NINIAN'S DEPARTURE

THE next few days were very busy ones, and the whole household seemed to be engaged in getting Ninian ready for departure. Audrey saw but little of her brother; he was absorbed in his own preparations, and also in his new hero. She found the intervening days very trying. Avoiding Myles as much as possible, she was, nevertheless, compelled on several occasions to meet him. He made no reference to their former conversation, but sometimes she found his eyes resting upon her with an expression that taught her something of his suffering. He was to go away without hope. She had grown a little afraid of him. He had come so suddenly, so tempestuously, into their lives; he was sweeping Ninian out of her sight; he had taught her that he ardently desired to make her his wife. She felt sometimes as if she and Ninian had become pawns in his game. She was almost acutely aware of his strength of purpose, of his iron determination. She admired those qualities in him, and she knew that she could never feel quite indifferent to him. But what she felt for him was admiration, even respect, but never love.

She and Mrs. Corby accompanied the travellers down to the docks to bid them a final farewell on board ship. Audrey felt she could not forego that last sight of her brother. Ninian looked so entirely youthful, so eager, just like a boy going to a picnic, that she could almost forget in looking at him that he was facing hardships and fatigues, and even perils. He saw everything painted rose-colour; he

felt no pain at all about going away and leaving his sister.

On deck he drew her aside with a face full of importance.

"Sis," he said eagerly, "I do believe Dorling is in love with you. He stares at you all the time! That'll be simply splendid, he's such a ripping chap. You must marry him when we come back. I'd like frightfully to have him for a brother-in-law!"

"Oh no, Ninian, I don't care for him at all. At least not in that way," said Audrey, confused and distressed.

She had told no one of her interview with Dorling. She was certain that everyone would think her very foolish indeed to refuse him. Mrs. Corby, Ninian, perhaps even Hubert. . .

"Why, has he asked you to marry him?" said Ninian sternly.

He stood before her with all the mercilessness of youth. She did not speak.

"*Has* he?" inquired Ninian again.

"Yes. The other day. . ." said Audrey, in a low voice.

"And you *refused* him?" said Ninian, in an incredulous tone.

"Yes," Audrey admitted reluctantly.

"It is impossible!" exclaimed Ninian angrily. "Why think of the honour! A great man like that, and a little nobody like you!"

The tears came into Audrey's eyes. It was cruel of Ninian to be angry and try to quarrel with her now, when they had so few minutes left in which to talk to each other.

"Oh Ninian, I know I'm not nearly good enough for him. It isn't that. . . But I don't care for him. . . Sometimes I feel almost afraid of him —he looks so stern. . ."

"A woman ought to be afraid of her husband," said Ninian, in a priggish tone. "Well, you'll never get another chance like that, Audrey, and some day you'll be sorry you were such a little fool!"

Mrs. Corby came up to them.

"Dear Audrey—it's time to go. . ."

Ninian bent his head and kissed his sister in a cold disapproving fashion. "I wonder he ever took me at all when you've put the lid on it like that!" he said indignantly.

The angry contemptuous look he bestowed upon her hurt her even more than his hard words. She could never remember that he had spoken to her in this way before.

"Oh Ninian, I did hope you'd be on my side. . ."

"Not when I see you making a hash of everything," he said, with the calm omniscience of youth. "Why, think of his place in Scotland, and the shooting and fishing! And he told me when he gives up travelling he means to keep a yacht. You might have thought of me a little, but girls are always so beastly selfish."

Mrs. Corby, who had moved away during this conversation, now approached them again.

"Audrey, that's the second time they've rung the bell. Good-bye, Ninian dear."

As she went up to her nephew, smiling with hand outstretched, Audrey found herself face to face with Myles Dorling.

"Good-bye, Miss Tressider," he said gravely.

"Good-bye," said Audrey. Her eyes were still swimming with tears—tears that he knew perfectly well were not being shed for him. Ah, if she could have spared him just a thousandth part of the love she bestowed upon Ninian, how amply satisfied he would have been! "You will take care of Ninian, won't you? Don't let him do splendid reckless

things. He doesn't know what fear is. Please bring him back safely. . . ." Her voice trembled a little.

"I will do my best," he said. "I really think you need not be anxious."

The next moment she had turned away, and with one last look at Ninian she followed Mrs. Corby down the gangway to the quay. It seemed to her in the anguish of that moment that she was going forward into darkness. She had never been parted from Ninian for any length of time before, and now he had gone away angry with her because she would not marry the man whom he admired above all other men. Audrey's tears flowed unchecked as she drove back through the busy London streets and crowded city ways to her aunt's house.

Mrs. Corby said nothing; she was very far from divining the real cause of Audrey's weeping. She even wondered whether it had anything to do with Myles.

They lunched alone together. It had been settled that Audrey was to start for Millborough on the following day. She longed to begin her new life at once. Here in London she would only brood over Ninian's departure. She went up to her own room after luncheon and found that the process of packing had already begun. Trifles lay about in neat heaps; she turned them over idly, wondering whether it would be worth while to take them all. That blouse, for instance. . . She had not worn it for a long time. So much untidiness always seemed to come to the surface when one began to pack, and yet it was impossible to throw it all away. She folded the blouse with care and put it with the others in the trunk. Her maid, a round-eyed young woman, watched her. They worked together in silence till the winter dusk deepened in the little room.

Audrey went downstairs to tea. Her face was

calm again and all traces of tears had vanished, but she still felt hurt and bruised by Ninian's rough speaking. So she was always to remember him like that, all the time he was away, the young angry face, the blazing eyes, the lips pelting out reproaches at her. . . . And it would always hurt her whenever she thought of it.

Mrs. Corby was alone that afternoon. She looked up and smiled as Audrey came into the room.

"I have nearly finished packing," said the girl.

"I am sorry you are leaving me," said Mrs. Corby. She put out her hand and touched Audrey's. "I should like to have kept you here."

"Hubert wants me, I think," said Audrey.

"But I want you, too. Here with me, leading the same normal life that girls ordinarily lead. It would be better for you. You've no notion what Millborough is like."

"Aunt Cynthia, I wasn't brought up like other girls. Ninian and I were always left a great deal to each other. Sometimes we were left with people for nearly a year, and all that time we never saw our mother. And when she was with us she was bored and unhappy because she wasn't with Hubert."

As she thus unconsciously criticized the late Mrs. Tressider's attitude towards her children, Mrs. Corby could not help admitting the justice of her judgment.

It was true, yet she wished that Audrey had not said it, had not realized it.

Audrey went on speaking.

"So you can understand what it means to me to lose Ninian like this. Just for a passing whim of his. There was no earthly reason why he should go."

"Myles told me that he had asked you to be his wife," said Mrs. Corby, suddenly.

Audrey's face changed, reddened and then grew pale.

"Oh, don't please let us talk about that, Aunt Cynthia!" She put her hands up to her face as if to shut out the vision of Ninian's shining anger. "Ninian went away angry with me for that very reason. He wanted me to marry Sir Myles because he was rich and famous—and he said I was a fool —and he would hardly kiss me good-bye!"

It was strange, but at that moment she was not thinking only of her brother. She was back again in the frosty dusk of the grey London street, walking, as it seemed to her, in the deepening shadows with Myles, surrounded, too, by the confused half-muffled stir in which no particular sound or cry predominated, but which was caused by the ceaseless traffic, by the whirr of unnumbered wheels, some near and some distant. She had not realized, until afterwards, how great a crisis she had passed through. Love had come to her, quite unsought, quite abruptly, and she had rejected it without hesitation. And if she had not rejected it how strangely would the whole tenor of her life have been altered now. She would be waiting for two men to return, not one. She would be waiting for Myles, thinking of him, writing to him, eagerly watching for his letters. And everyone would have been delighted.

"I didn't love him!" she cried suddenly, breaking through her reserve. "It was quite useless. Of course, I am sorry. . . ."

"You are very young," said Mrs. Corby. "You have not learned to love or hate."

"Hate?" She caught at the word and looked up frowning. It had an ugly sound, just as love had a beautiful sound. "But I think I do almost hate one person, Aunt Cynthia."

Mrs. Corby smiled. "My dear Audrey. . ."

"Only I've never seen him!"

"Him?"

"His name is Adam Kemp," said Audrey, with quiet deliberation.

"Adam Kemp!" repeated Mrs. Corby in dismayed accents. "Why, what do you know of him, my dear child?"

"He is unfair to Hubert. If Hubert were morbid or sensitive Kemp's writings might affect him very much. He says bitter things about him. Anyone who knows Millborough must know they are meant for Hubert! Mary Ince told me something about it. She knows them both."

Mrs. Corby's voice was almost unnaturally controlled. That Audrey should disclose herself to be thus already conversant with happenings at Millborough not only astonished her, but filled her with vague and disturbing apprehensions. "That silly little Evangeline Standen went quite mad about him last year. I don't have that kind of person in my house. But her mother has no control over her at all. And Beatrice is equally helpless to check her."

Audrey leaned her cheek on her hand and gazed meditatively into the fire. Seen thus she was almost arrestingly beautiful. The pure and pale line of her profile was drawn with decision and yet with extreme delicacy and perfection. The soft almost black hair was brushed close to her head accentuating its smallness. Her dark eyes burned with a deep steady fire.

It seemed to Mrs. Corby that Myles, unsuccessful as he had been, had yet aroused the girl, awakening her to a vivifying sense of the realities of life. Love had not indeed touched her heart, but its shining wings had brushed lightly across her senses, stirring her as it were to new knowledge.

Mrs. Corby had often felt a certain misgiving at

the prospect of Audrey's life with Hubert. But now an actual fear of that future came over her. For the first time her dread took shape, and fastened itself upon something at once tangible and sinister. It derived magnitude in proportion as its nebulousness gave place to definite human form. Adam Kemp . . . She had heard a great deal about him. And he had already aroused Audrey's attention, even if it were of a hostile kind, making her eagerly defensive of Hubert. But Mrs. Corby knew that one of the most powerful weapons the man possessed was his ability to charm women. And he was there at Millborough, conducting a ceaseless campaign against Hubert and the industrial condition of his workers.

Audrey's next words seemed to intensify rather than diminish her fears.

"When I go to Millborough I mean to see him—to tell him how cruel and unfair he is to Hubert!"

Mrs. Corby rose a little restlessly and came across to where her niece was sitting.

"If I were in the habit of giving advice," she said gravely, "I should entreat you, Audrey, to do nothing of the kind. I know Kemp well by reputation, and I have often blamed Mrs. Standen for allowing Evangeline to invite him to their house. He is a vindictive unscrupulous man, and he is very strong. Leave him alone, child!"

"Why?" asked Audrey, interested.

"He does not belong to your own class of life. We have to remember these things. . . He might hurt you very much."

She wished more than ever that Audrey had been going to Millborough as Myles's promised wife. It would have been a shield, an armour, enveloping, protecting. . .

"I am not at all afraid of him," said Audrey; "I

shall treat him with the contempt that Hubert does. Mrs. Grazebrook told me a great deal about it when we were staying with her. Of course, she doesn't like Hubert—I could see that. And she is fearfully interested in Kemp—I suppose on her sister's account."

"Oh Audrey," said Mrs. Corby, impulsively, "this life will be all wrong for you! I wish that both you and Ninian could have made a different choice. And I don't want you to be mixed up with Hubert's business side. I don't want you to know the Adam Kemps of this world, and read their horrible papers. If you could only have stayed with me until Myles and Ninian come back! . ."

"You mustn't expect me to change my mind about Sir Myles," said Audrey. "I could never bear the feeling that he was so much stronger than myself. That I was at his mercy, although I am sure he would almost always be kind. But he would want me to think his thoughts. . ." She paused abruptly, as if half-ashamed of the little vehement speech.

"I should have been so happy about your future if I thought you were to be his wife," said Mrs. Corby. "Of course, no one can persuade you to marry a man you don't care for. But I am sure you could have learnt to care for him. He spoke too soon—he came, perhaps, a little too soon into your life. You weren't ready for him."

She bent down and kissed Audrey's forehead. She was thinking to herself: "I can't help her—she won't let me help her. And she'll never come back to me and tell me that she's unhappy at Millborough. She's too proud for that."

CHAPTER V

MILLBOROUGH AND A MEETING

THE London express rushed into the station at Millborough towards the close of a bleak December day. From the stacks of chimneys that thrust their grim shapes upward through the smoke-laden fog, magnified by its influence into strange obelisk-like columns, volumes of unsavoury smoke were pitilessly ejected. Near at hand, a huge factory, studded with innumerable windows, disclosed a blaze of light. Otherwise, a sullen and impenetrable gloom hung over the unlovely manufacturing town.

Audrey had rubbed the window to gain a better view of the place where she had elected to live. The first impression was scarcely a stimulating one. She was also a victim of that curious depression which commonly assails the new arrival even in agreeable and beautiful surroundings. The spirit invariably rebels against change. It is confronted with the prospect of inevitable adjustment to new conditions.

Audrey had a passionate desire to make a success of her life. She wanted ardently to be of use, to help others, and particularly to gain the good opinion of Hubert. But as she approached Millborough she felt for the first time that her sojourn there might prove a failure. She would be up against stern things, grim things. She suddenly felt small, young, and rather useless. . . What would Hubert think of her? . . .

The train stopped, and taking her bag in her hand she leaned out of the window and summoned a porter to her assistance.

"Yes, there are some boxes in the van," she said. She stood on the platform, looking about her in rather a bewildered fashion.

"What name, miss?" asked the man, speaking with with a strong midland accent.

"Tressider," said Audrey.

In the wan gas-light that was struggling unequally and ineffectually against the deepening fog, it seemed to her that as she uttered her name a subtle change came over the man's face. He muttered something and left her abruptly.

A man who had been pacing the platform restlessly, waiting for the train, now stepped quickly forward and remained for a second near the spot where Audrey was standing looking round eagerly for Hubert. With this stranger she suddenly found herself face to face. His appearance was at once striking and unusual. He was so tall that he could not easily escape notice, and his figure was at once thin and ungainly. He stooped a little as he moved. The white face, ivory-coloured, with olive shadows under the eyes; the rather long and densely black hair, of which one lock fell unrestrained upon his forehead; the eyes immense and coal-black, the carelessness of his dress that almost amounted to slovenliness, were details that one swift look conveyed to Audrey. He was remarkable-looking, or surely she would not have observed him so attentively just then, with all the confusion around her, and with her mind concentrated upon the wish to recognize her brother, from whom she had been parted for nearly seven years. She was aware, too, that the stranger's eyes were fixed upon her with a swift sweeping look, at once attentive and critical.

Then a light touch on her arm made her turn swiftly in the opposite direction.

"Oh, there you are, Audrey," said Hubert's voice. "I thought I should never find you in this crowd."

The man, who must have heard every word of this

speech, turned away abruptly and slouched with rapid movements down the platform.

"I had been looking for you too," said Audrey, smiling up at her brother. She noticed then that his eyes were following with a curious attention that disappearing figure. Had he too seen him—noticed him?

"Who is that man, Hubert? Do you know him?" she asked.

"Which man?" Hubert's manner was slightly impatient. He seemed in a hurry to collect Audrey's things and to be gone.

"The one who was standing near me as you came up. He is over there now." She indicated the direction with a slight movement of her head.

"That man? Oh, that's a notorious person called Kemp," said Hubert. He frowned, and his face assumed a hard expression.

He was at that time about thirty-six years of age, a thin, spare man of middle height, clean-shaven, with blond hair that was becoming scanty. His eyes of a curious steel-like colour were hard and penetrating. His forehead was prominent and covered with deep horizontal lines. His mouth thin-lipped resembled a neat gash. Audrey, who was prepared to take him at her mother's valuation and to find him wholly adorable, was a little disconcerted at this first glimpse of her brother. He looked cold and hard. She knew at once that he would always expect her to behave sensibly, conventionally. There would be none of those delicious young moments she had known with Ninian, moments of delightful fooling, of irresponsible nonsense. He would expect her to be grave and quiet. She was quick to realize the kind of position she would occupy in the household of this busy, preoccupied man. Just a few minutes of Hubert's company sufficed to teach her that. She

followed him down the platform, feeling suddenly chilled, and the sense of depression that had attacked her in the train returned intensified by this meeting with her brother.

Yet all her life she had heard how wonderful Hubert was, what a miracle of cleverness and industry. If in her childhood he had ever spoken roughly or harshly to her, it had always been explained by her mother that it was because "darling Hubert didn't like little girls, especially when they were noisy and disturbed him." Or she was informed that, "Ninian was a tiresome boy—it gave Hubert a headache to have him in the room." Chilly rebukes such as these came back to her now from a remote past; they survived in her memory from very early days, and she had come to believe that she and Ninian must have been singularly disagreeable, badly-behaved children to have evoked anger from such a god-like creature as their elder brother.

But looking at Hubert now with the calm impartiality that was no longer biased by the fretful reproaches of her mother, she felt a tiny, almost disloyal, disbelief in the magnitude of her own childish misdemeanours.

"There's my luggage," said Audrey, pointing out some boxes that had been thrust on one side.

"What a lot!" said Hubert. "We must have them sent up. You can take your small things in the car."

"It isn't really so very much, Hubert, when you remember that I've come to stay with you for ever and ever!"

"That is absurd," he said, "you should not exaggerate. Many things may happen to induce you to leave Millborough. Besides, you may find it incurably dull. I have my work of course—it is different for me."

Audrey felt chilled and rebuked. She followed

him in silence. When the boxes had been placed upon a cab, Hubert led her to the car which was awaiting them outside the station. Its two brilliant lights glittered in the sombre gloom. The chauffeur threw open the door and Audrey stepped in.

The brother and sister drove in silence through broad, wet streets, cut by the gleaming lines of tramways. Crowded trams passed up and down, their loud bells clanging to warn people of their approach. The fog had lifted a little, and Audrey could see great shops, brilliantly lighted and exposing sumptuous wares. The pavements were thronged with men and women and children. The car sped swiftly up the road, and then the character of the streets began to change. The big shops gave place to small ones, poorly lighted. The people who moved along the narrow pavements seemed to belong to a different race. Audrey noticed their white, pinched faces, the old-young look that characterized so many of them, the sharpened contours, the dull, nervous eyes. She drew her furs more closely about her throat and shivered involuntarily. Millborough was certainly not a land of promise.

The narrow, squalid streets had given place now to low sheds which seemed to stretch interminably on either side of a long ill-lighted road. Every now and then she was aware of an odour, pervasive, disagreeable, that polluted the air even more than the volumes of black smoke that shot in clouds from the huge gaunt chimneys, as from the crater of a ceaselessly active volcano. In this malodourous darkness she felt the presence of malignant forces. She was sensitive and impressionable, and she knew already that she hated Millborough. She could never be happy there. She would crave always for blue skies and pure, flower-fragrant air.

Now even the sheds were left behind, and the

lights of the car showed her in furtive flashes the details of a country road, with fields stretching away on either side and thin hedges growing on the top of tall banks, with glimpses here and there of a sluggish canal. She felt that if she could have seen it by daylight she would have been aware only of a desolate stretch of country, poisoned by foul smoke and ill odours, blighted fields where scarcely a blade of grass had courage to grow.

And then her mind reverted to Kemp, to the glimpse she had had of him that evening at the station. The thorn in Hubert's side. . . The fly in the ointment. . . The man who spoiled something of the perfection of Hubert's satisfaction in his own commercial success. She saw again the ivory-coloured face—almost livid in its pallor—the strange black eyes that had swept her with a glance that was fierce in its intensity.

"Things are going badly here," said Hubert suddenly, "thanks to that man Kemp whom you saw at the station just now. There is morally certain to be a strike among the hands, and if old Smith dies now, Kemp is sure to oppose me and I shall lose the seat. My men were perfectly loyal and contented before he settled here."

It was his ambition to represent Millborough in Parliament, and he had already been chosen as the liberal-unionist candidate in the event of the present member's death, a contingency not unlikely, considering the advanced age of that gentleman.

"Mrs. Grazebrook told me about it," said Audrey.

"The Standens have behaved atrociously about Kemp!" declared Hubert, his face reddening with anger. "They ought never to have had him there, considering the attacks he has made upon me. But they profess to admire his poetry!" His voice held

a kind of bitter scorn. His old friendship for Mrs. Standen and Lady Ince had not sufficed to induce them to boycott Kemp. A man who ought never to have been received in any decent house! Low-born, springing from unknown parentage. A gutter-genius as someone had caustically described him. Hubert, doubting the genius, generously conceded the gutter.

He relapsed into silence and the car turned in suddenly at some high gates and sped up a long, bare-looking drive. It stopped before the great barrack-like Victorian villa that Mrs. Corby had remembered with such acute dismay.

It stood about a mile from the outskirts of Millborough, and was almost as ugly within as without. The hall, where Audrey now found herself, was hideous; the walls were covered with a glazed paper of mustard-like hue, and a large, black stove gave forth a suffocating heat. She followed Hubert quickly into a passage beyond.

"You'd like to go to your room, I expect," he said. "I don't take tea myself, but I'll tell them to send you up a cup. I told them to light a fire. You must make yourself as comfortable as possible in this bachelor abode." He laughed mirthlessly. "Kemp accuses me in his paper of living a life of idle luxury. By the way, he is coming here this evening, at his own request. He has a scheme, he says, to lay before me. He will hear some pretty plain speaking before he goes."

He led the way up a flight of broad, high stairs, and, going across the landing, he flung open a door at the other end.

"This is your room, Audrey," he said.

It was an immense, bleak-looking apartment with shiny chintz curtains adorning both bed and windows. The same chintz covered a sofa and two or

three chairs. A fire, that could not have been lit very long, crackled in the grate, but had done little to diminish the sense of cold that prevailed. Audrey repressed a shiver and said:

"What a nice big room, Hubert, I am sure I shall be very comfortable here, thank you."

She smiled up into his face, as if with an effort to create a feeling of closer friendliness between them.

Hubert, satisfied that she was contented with his efforts on her behalf, left her alone and went downstairs to his study.

CHAPTER VI

HUBERT TRESSIDER

AUDREY dressed herself with unusual care that evening, putting on a white tea-gown of some soft, clinging material, with a turquoise-coloured girdle at her waist. She went downstairs to the drawing-room to wait for Hubert. He had not as yet appeared, and she had time to make an exhaustive examination of the room. It had the same bleak, uninhabited look as the other rooms she had seen, and she wondered if her brother ever set his foot inside it from one year's end to another. The shiny, white paper that adorned the walls gave it a peculiarly chilly look on that December night. The carpet, too, was terrible to Audrey's young eyes, although to a later generation it might have possessed points of attraction, being decorated with a huge basket of early-Victorian roses woven upon a cream-coloured ground. The furniture was solid and ugly. The pictures were arranged upon the walls with annoying symmetry. A large, mahogany table stood in the centre of the room and upon it rested a number of calf-bound books, even a photograph album, whose pages she now scanned idly. The old-fashioned modes of the early sixties rendered those ancient faded photographs almost grotesque. The women in monstrous crinolines, wearing their hair in huge *chignons;* the men smug and whiskered, and clothed in garments that did not look as if they had been made for them. She was still engaged in this occupation when the door opened and Hubert came into the room. He stared at his sister in surprise, but he said nothing. She would soon learn to discard London customs in Millbor-

ough, and dress less extravagantly when they were alone together in the evening. That dress of hers was certainly very pretty, but altogether too smart for the occasion. Its shapelessness displeased him. It seemed to flow about her, and that blue girdle scarcely restrained it at all. But the effect was charming, and gave her a girlish grace. He had spent such countless, dull evenings alone that he felt rather glad, than otherwise, to have her there.

It occurred to him as they sat opposite to each other at the dinner-table that evening, that Audrey was distinctly attractive. Some people might even consider her beautiful. She had a strong resemblance to her father, and the Tressiders had always been famous for their good looks, of a dark, rather radiant type. Yes, she would certainly be admired. It would be tiresome to take her out, and perhaps he had better acknowledge soon that, in any case, social gatherings in Millborough would scarcely be in her line. She had so little in common with the often highly-educated daughters of the rich manufacturers, who were the people he knew best, and among whom he really found himself most at ease. The sons of such houses would probably admire her, but, of course, he would never allow a match of that kind. She must remember she was a Tressider. Although he belonged so absolutely, both in looks and tastes, as well as in opinions, to his mother's people, the Chestons, he never forgot that he was a Tressider in name. Audrey might, if she chose, make a brilliant marriage. She was pretty, would not be penniless; she belonged to Mrs. Corby's world. He had despised it for more years than he cared to count, but for Audrey, it was an absolutely suitable environment. She would soon grow tired of Millborough. Let her wait till the novelty had worn off, and then

he could easily find an excuse for sending her back, kindly, but very firmly, to her aunt.

Audrey did most of the talking that first night. She told Hubert about Ninian's departure, mentioning Myles as little as possible. She did not want Hubert to know that she had refused him. She felt sure that he would blame her. Sometimes she was not very far from blaming herself. Perhaps all her notions about falling in love were mere childish fancies, pretty enough, but silly and idle. Her glimpse of Millborough had already given her a sharp sense of all that she had forfeited by leaving her aunt's house. Here she was, in this great, dreary barrack of a house, alone with Hubert. He must have made considerable preparations to receive her; she felt sure that she had intruded upon a life long crystallized by custom, and that he perhaps regarded her arrival rather in the light of an invasion. The drawing-room, so obviously never used, had been prepared for her. She wondered if there were a smaller sitting-room, which she could have for her own and furnish as she pleased in some simple, pretty fashion, at once cosy and comfortable. . . Her own books arranged on pretty white shelves. Flowers everywhere. A pretty carpet, thick and soft, coloured, perhaps, like grass, seen in shadow. Ivory-coloured walls with her few pictures hanging on them, not arranged, in the least, symmetrically. Lowestoft bowls, full of flowers, and shaded, concealed electric lamps such as Mrs. Corby had. She must ask Hubert, and tell him that the drawing-room was too large.

Just as dinner was ending, a message was brought to Hubert. He frowned as he scanned the paper on which it was written, and his face assumed hard lines. As Audrey glanced at him then, she thought there was something almost terrible about Hubert.

He looked as if he would certainly crush and even destroy anything or anyone that stood in his way. He was angry now with a slow, cold, inward anger, and though he did not say a word at first, Audrey recognized in him her mother's cold, terrifying anger that was all the more unendurable, because it kept her silent. When she was a child she used to think: "Oh, if she would only speak! . . Anything rather than that silence. . ."

Although Audrey was unaware of the fact, matters at Millborough were just then approaching a crisis. Kemp had published a series of articles on the conditions of the workers in various, dangerous trades, and in one of them Hubert and the Works over which he ruled had been impaled. There was no doubt at all that Kemp had attacked Hubert, although no name was mentioned. The articles, about a dozen in number, had appeared under the title of *Christian Slaves*. But the article about Hubert had been the most violent and bitter of them all. Kemp had scarcely disguised in the least, the person and place thus held up to public denigration. And since then the discontent had grown, manifesting itself in a hundred little ways. Last week some of the more violent of the agitators had been turned away. Since then the workmen had held meetings in their leisure hours, and there had been talk of a strike until the culprits had been reinstated. Now, the message informed Hubert that there had been a disturbance down in the factory. He did not say a word of its purport to Audrey, but rose at once from the table.

"I am sorry to leave you but I must go down to my office," he said.

Presently Audrey rose and went back into the drawing-room. She sat down by the fire. Why had Hubert gone out to-night? Had anything hap-

pened? Anything, perhaps, connected with Adam Kemp? She dreaded spending this first evening quite alone, and wondered whether Hubert would like her to sit up until his return. She wished to please him. But he had gone away angry, she had seen that in his face, and perhaps he would only think her in the way, if he found her still sitting there, waiting for him, when he came back. She knew and feared the quality of his silence. If he had only burst forth into angry words it would have been less terrifying.

When the servant brought her some coffee, a sudden impulse prompted her to say:

"If Mr. Kemp should call before my brother returns please show him in here."

The man's face expressed surprise, but he answered with perfect civility:

"Very well, miss."

It was the first order she had given in her brother's house, and Audrey felt a little alarmed at her own temerity. She was almost certain that Hubert would not wish her to see Kemp, to know Kemp. She knew nothing of those violent recent attacks, except the brief summary which Mrs. Grazebrook had given her. But she was determined to remonstrate with Kemp. She might never have such another opportunity of speaking to him alone.

She must protect Hubert from this man. The thought gave her courage. . .

CHAPTER VII

ADAM KEMP

THE silence of the room—a silence which seemed to permeate the whole house—became almost unbearable to Audrey. She was assailed by a certain formless anxiety about her brother. Was there any actual danger? She shook off the thought as an absurd one. She reminded herself that she was unacquainted with his habits, and that it might be a frequent custom with him to go down to his office after dinner. Yet, what was in the message? Why had he left her so abruptly, with scarcely a word of explanation and that look of anger in his eyes? . .

Audrey rose restlessly. As she did so she caught sight of herself in a long mirror that hung on the opposite wall. She saw herself slim, pale, white clad, with the blue girdle at her own waist providing the only note of colour. Her dark hair made a patch of darkness against the white walls of the room. She went to the table, and turned over the books that had probably been lying there for the last fifty years. One of them had an inscription inside. It was a prize awarded to one Henry Gilbert Cheston for good conduct. That was her uncle, the man from whom Hubert had inherited wealth and the Works at Millborough. Her mother's elder brother. He had been dead about fourteen years. . .

As she stood there idly, turning over the leaves, the door opened. She expected to see Hubert. Instead she heard the man-servant's voice announce: "Mr. Kemp, miss."

Adam Kemp came into the room. Seen now under the glare of the electric light he seemed to be

quite extraordinarily pale, almost livid. His clothes were ill-fitting and hung loosely upon his gaunt, rather ungainly form. His dark hair was brushed off his forehead, negligently, but with a certain picturesque grace, except for one lock rather longer than the rest which fell continually forward upon a brow that was perhaps the most beautiful part of his face, the brow of a poet, of a dreamer. His black eyes had a curious, penetrating gaze, and as they rested upon Audrey, the sister of his enemy, they seemed to sweep her from head to foot. But he was awkward, almost slovenly in his movements, and to be shown thus suddenly into the presence of a lady when he was confidently hoping to meet that said enemy face to face, was perhaps the most disconcerting thing that could have happened to him.

He recognized Audrey, immediately, as the girl whom Tressider had met on the platform at Millborough station that very evening.

"I came to see Mr. Tressider," he said, halting under the chandelier, at least a couple of yards from where she was standing. The strong, unshaded light made him blink like an owl. Yet his first impression —one that he never quite lost through all the subsequent history of those days—was that he had seen a vision.

"I am his sister," she said. She held her little, dark head high, as if she wished him to understand that she was proud of the fact. "He has had to go down to his office this evening and I don't know what time he will be back. You see I have only just come —I don't know his ways."

She went on speaking in that cool, low charming tone of hers, partly because she felt that he was embarrassed, and even angry, at being thus confronted with her alone. He had not come to see her, and

it was in obedience to her own request that he had been thus ushered unexpectedly into her presence.

"I must apologize for disturbing you," he said, "but I came to see your brother on business, and I understood that he expected to see me here to-night."

There was nothing of the self-made man, of the "gutter-genius" in his speech. Indeed, there was something almost musical in the intonations of his voice. He spoke more loudly than usual because he was nervous and on the defensive. He had crossed his enemy's threshold for the first time, and it was the worst of luck that his visit should thus synchronize with the arrival of Miss Tressider, who had greeted him as a friend, quietly, and without embarrassment or any suggestion of hostility. But, then, as she had just told him, she was new to Millborough. Possibly she knew nothing of the turmoil that prevailed there.

"Won't you wait for him?" she said, in that quiet, grave way of hers that unconsciously soothed him. "He is sure to be back soon. I know he expected you this evening, because he told me so."

She crossed the room and sat down by the fire. He watched her movements; they were light and graceful.

"Won't you sit down?" she said, indicating a chair.

Her manner was at once so gentle and so cordial that he took the chair opposite to hers near the fire without further hesitation, and mechanically held out his hands to the blaze. He reflected with some bitterness that she was too new an occupant of Millborough Hall to have heard all that her brother could have told her in abuse of him.

To the man, weary and anxious, consumed with zeal for his cause, this woman in her soft and dainty clothes represented a world in which he savagely told

himself he had no part, a world indeed which he tried to combat with all his strength.

She poured out a cup of coffee and gave it to him. Adam Kemp drank it and put the cup down on a little table beside him. He had had little time for food that day. Last night he had slept in London and he had returned by an early train to Millborough. Business had called him in the afternoon to the neighbouring town of Eastgrove, whence he had returned only when Audrey had seen him at the station that evening. His was a life of continual work, of stress and difficulty. He had little leisure. As the sub-editor of a daily paper, he was often compelled to work far into the night. It was in this newspaper that his vitriolic articles, under the heading of *Christian Slaves*, had appeared. The attack upon Hubert had been a singularly brutal and violent one, especially in view of the fact that Tressider, whatever his faults may have been, did earnestly seek to better the condition of his workmen.

There were two people in Adam Kemp, the socialist and the poet. One was often at war with the other. He had a spiritual side, atrophied and starved by reason of the strenuous energy he bestowed upon other things. Doors had been opened to the poet that would have been closed eternally against the socialist leader. Difficult doors, such as Mrs. Standen's. He had had glimpses of another world; it "helped him," he used to say, to see how that world lived.

To-night, as he sat opposite to Audrey, bestowing furtive glances upon her beauty, the poet was in the ascendant. He could have written verses, he told himself, to arrest her attention. There were moments when that side of him clamoured for recognition, rebelled against the man's political energy, the all-absorbing work that claimed the whole of his

waking hours. Generally, he knew how to silence it. But not to-night. . .

Her voice roused him from his dreaming.

"I am afraid there must have been a disturbance," she said, "for I'm sure Hubert had no thought of going out to-night until he received a sudden message just as we were finishing dinner. These perpetual disturbances are worrying him. I heard that in London before I came here. You see he has done so much for his men. You are more or less a stranger here, aren't you? So you can hardly realize how much he has done."

It was dangerous ground, and she knew it, but she was fearless and spoke with the ignorant confidence of youth.

"You are making a mistake," he said, "I am not quite a stranger in Millborough. I have lived here for nearly a year, and I knew the place when I was a boy. I worked here in one of these factories as a boy."

"Hubert's men used to be so contented," she said.

Adam Kemp lifted his black brows, and his eyes shone with a warning light as if all colour had suddenly forsaken them, and left them only with that strange, white-hot radiance. Many a man had learned to fear that look of his.

"So much the worse for them!" he cried, in a loud voice that seemed to echo through the room. "So much the worse for them—for us all—that they should be contented with their miserable lot!"

"Hubert has worked hard to better their condition," she said proudly. Her loyalty to this almost unknown brother was intensified by the attack upon him.

"How long did you say *you* had been here?" inquired Kemp, with fierce irony.

"I came to-day," she answered.

"Then I hope you will be wiser soon." He rose from his seat and paced restlessly up and down the room. He reminded her of a caged beast that roams between the bars, as if forever hoping that one of them may break. "If you use your eyes while you are here and reject the rose-coloured glasses that will be freely offered to you, you may be wiser by next week! Or you may remain blind for a whole year—for all your life. Perhaps it would be a happier thing for you if you could remain blind. Go on believing that these slaves are happy—these men and women who toil in Tressider's Works. Don't let the thought ever come to you that it is pitiful they should be satisfied with so little! Oh, to me it is *most* pitiful! It is my duty to rouse them from this ignoble content."

Something in his voice, in the very eloquence of his speech, thrilled and moved her strangely. The man looked more alive than anyone she had ever seen. Yet there was a sinister import in his words, as of one who had not yet put forth his full strength in that task to which he was immutably dedicated. And for the first time there crept a little fear into Audrey's heart that she might learn to see with his eyes and not with Hubert's. This irresistible force, whose power she was so quick to recognize, might sweep her forward and onward into the very lists that opposed her brother.

Was he consciously using his influence now to win her over to his side? Had it come into his mind that his enemy's sister was a convert very much worth the making? She could look back with a kind of shame upon her own timid desire to bring about a rapprochement between the two men. She had believed it might be possible to convert Kemp, to lead him away from his chosen path, to force him to see the situation from Hubert's point of view. She felt,

all at once, small and young and helpless. It seemed to her then that Millborough had held out cruel resistless arms to seize and crush her. . .

He sat down again, silent and morose. After all, what was the use of speaking seriously to a woman of that type? His sisters' room, somewhere in the dismal neighbourhood of the Bow Road, rose up before his eyes in grim contrast to his present surroundings. He could almost see the elder one, Jane, bending over the bedside of Rachel who was already stricken with a mortal malady, brought about by the hardships and privations of her married life, and aggravated by the consistent cruelty of her husband. It was unlikely she would ever recover. The worst thing in his experience—the thing that had touched him most nearly—had been the suffering and misery of Rachel's life. She was the youngest of the three, and as a girl she had been pretty and bright, with soft hair and shining eyes. Now she was an emaciated, broken woman who had brought four dead children into the world. She was perhaps not a decade older than the girl in front of him. It was the very contrast of it that made him wish, quite savagely, to hurt Audrey. And he had hurt her; he could read that in her grave, sorrowful eyes.

"Please do not talk like that," she was saying in a voice that charmed him in spite of himself, "at least not here, not to me. Everywhere else it may be your duty—I know nothing of that."

There was a note of appeal in her voice.

"Why did *you* come here?" he said suddenly. "Millborough isn't at all the right place for you. You'd far better go back to London, if that's where you came from."

What was the use of showing her all the misery that lay scarcely a mile from these sheltering doors? Why should she ever know anything of the squalor,

the penury, the hideousness of it all—the cold in winter, the stifling heat of summer? Here in her brother's house she might live apart from the knowledge of these things; she need never learn to pity those toilers. . . But she would learn. He could see that in her face, in her eyes. She was pitiful, gentle, compassionate. . . It wouldn't be in her, to turn deaf ears and blind eyes to it all. It was borne in upon him then that her pity would surely be a thing of almost divine tenderness. But his message was not to her. She was so utterly ignorant of the other side, the tragic unendurable side. . . It was foolish of him to say anything about it to her. Probably after this evening he would never speak to her again. His dealings with Hubert Tressider must soon result in open warfare—a conflict that would necessarily involve all who belonged to him. Even his sister. . . Kemp put aside the thought quickly, it held something that was distasteful.

Perhaps never again would he have the chance of such an intimate personal talk with her. It was a pity, because she was sensitive, teachable, impressionable. . . If she had not been Tressider's sister he might have enlisted her help. .

Her voice broke across the silence.

"Perhaps you can tell me something I forgot to ask Hubert this evening. Is the Catholic church very far from here?"

He looked at her and, instead of answering, asked her a counter-question.

"Are you—are you—a Catholic?"

"Yes," she said. "Can you tell me?"

"It is more than a mile. When you come to the first row of small houses you turn to the right and walk down Summer Street till you come to it. It . . it is not a large building."

"Thank you. Do you know the name of the priest?"

"There are two. The one I know best is Father Blake. He is very much liked among the poor."

There was a little stir in the hall. Audrey heard the sound of a door being opened and then shut. A murmur of voices followed, and she could hear Hubert's, raised a little in anger as it seemed to her, as if he were rebuking the servant who had let him in. She and Kemp looked at each other in silence.

Then the door opened and Hubert came quickly into the room. There was mud on his boots, and his face was reddened from the cold air outside. The thought of Kemp had passed so completely out of his mind that he felt an angry surprise at hearing he was there, with Audrey. He had not wished them to meet. The two men bowed to each other, Hubert stiffly and Kemp ungraciously. Hubert's manner was icy.

He spoke first to Audrey.

"I am sorry you sat up for me—you must be tired after your journey. I came back as soon as I could, thinking you might be anxious."

There was a subtle reproof in his manner which taught her that she had offended, although he uttered no rebuke. She stood there, between the two men, and suddenly she felt frail and helpless. She looked from one to the other. Hubert . . . and Kemp. Both strong men, hating each other, violently opposed to each other, working against each other. She felt that she had been disloyal in having listened thus to Kemp with scarcely a word of remonstrance to-night.

"I *was* anxious, Hubert," she said, and her voice trembled a little. "I am glad you have come back."

"If it is too late for you to see me to-night, I will come another time," said Kemp.

"It is still quite early," said Hubert frigidly, and with a secret determination that Kemp should never again have any excuse for crossing his threshold while Audrey was in the house. "Will you come into my study? We can talk things over there. I regret that I am late for our appointment, but there was an unfortunate—incident down at the Works to-night and my foreman sent for me." He turned to his sister. "Good-night, Audrey."

"Good-night," said Audrey. She held out her hand timidly to Kemp. "Good-night, Mr. Kemp."

Kemp took her hand and for one brief second his dark eyes met hers, boldly, squarely, yet with a certain wistful appeal. Then he followed Hubert out of the room.

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CHAPTER VIII

ENEMIES

AUDREY slept little that night. When she did fall, for an hour or so before dawn, into a restless, uneasy slumber, curious dreams disturbed her. Hubert and Kemp,—Ninian and Myles,—these four men haunted her dreams, invading them like a little army. But the most persistent figure of them all was Adam Kemp. When she awoke, his eyes seemed to be staring at her across the darkness of the room,—eyes that seemed to beckon and command.

She rose before it was light and dressed hurriedly, murmuring as she did so those ejaculatory prayers she had been taught in her convent school. Outside in the dark, winter sky there were no stars, and she could hear the soft rain pricking the windows. When she was ready, she stole downstairs. The house was still strange to her, as houses must necessarily be till they have been seen by daylight. She fumbled, as she went, for the switches of the electric light, concealed in corners. Once in the hall she knocked against a table. The noise rang out sharply, and she began to fear she must have awakened the sleeping household. At last, she found her way to the front door and switched on the light. She threw it open and stood on the doorstep for a moment, gazing up into the dark sky while the rain fell softly, almost caressingly, upon her face. A tall plane tree lifted black boughs against the sky, and below it some dark laurel bushes stood huddled together as if for mutual protection.

In the drive, the gravel was reduced to a sponge-like condition by the wet weather. The thin stunted trees that guarded it on both sides flung showers of

drops into her face as she passed by. She plodded on bravely. It was part of her daily life to go to Mass every morning, and so far she had only allowed temporary ill-health to interrupt the habit. She and Ninian had always been sent to Catholic schools; it was a point upon which their father had been very insistent. He had wanted them both to have all the inestimable advantages of an early Catholic training, but he himself did not live to see the fruit it was destined to bear in his two younger children.

As she walked on, Audrey wished she had told Hubert last night that it was her habit to go to church early in the morning. She might possibly be late for breakfast, and he would inquire and find that she was not in her room. She had seen no one before she left the house that morning, and she began to have a little fear that Hubert might be anxious when her absence was discovered. They had had so little time for conversation last night, and perhaps she had hesitated a little, also, about speaking so soon of the things of her religion. And he might not approve of her going out so early. It was still dark, and she did not know her way in the least, except for those few rough directions Kemp had given her.

Now she was hurrying down the long road. It was lit only at intervals, and as yet, scarcely the faintest grey streak indicated the approach of day in the east. The mud was deep, and every now and then her foot splashed into a puddle, and the shock of the cold water against her ankle startled her.

Then the houses began. At first a solitary little row, standing alone and aloof by the roadside. They were the early forerunners of those monotonous squalid little streets through which she had passed in the motor last night. She remembered Kemp's directions and turned to the right. Yes, this was

Summer Street; she could see the name written up. Why had it been called by such a name? Perhaps in irony. One could not imagine that even summer could beautify it. A gas-lamp cast a flickering, uncertain illumination upon it. She saw the low grey houses, all joined together with a tiny plot of earth in front of each. There was an absolute sameness about them; they all possessed two windows above, and a window and a front door below. Within many of them, lights showed. Suddenly, the door of one of them opened, and a woman emerged. Her head was enveloped in a dark shawl. She looked thin and poor. Their eyes met, and Audrey paused.

"Is this the way to the Catholic church, please?" she asked.

The woman stared at her. "Yes, it's down there. Can't say I know it—I'm chapel." She vouchsafed this information with a curious indifference.

"Thank you," said Audrey.

She walked on quickly, and at the end of the street, which curved abruptly to the right, she came in sight of a small grey building, modern, insignificant. She pushed open the door and entered it. A clock struck eight as she did so, and almost immediately a priest, accompanied by an acolyte, came in and went up to the altar.

Her walk had been a long one, had taken her more than half an hour, although she had walked quickly. She felt a little exhausted by the unusual exercise. . . But she was glad now that she had made the effort. She had a kind of unexpressed wish to begin her new life in this way. And spiritual things meant a great deal to her. . . She wanted to sanctify that life of hers in Millborough at its very outset. Assuredly, it would hold for her trouble and perplexity, perhaps even a divided allegiance. Last night she had felt almost as if the conflicting forces around her

might tear her in pieces. She had learnt quickly enough that she could never regard Hubert as entirely right, nor Kemp as wholly wrong. Both men approached life from very different standpoints. Kemp, the ex-factory boy, had a closer personal experience of a workman's needs and point of view than Hubert, the master, could ever have. And she realized that between them they might cause her suffering. Life, she felt, would never be quite the same, easy, simple thing it had been with Mrs. Corby in London.

These thoughts had been in her mind all through that dark, lonely walk from the Hall, but now she was able without difficulty to put them aside, and to concentrate her whole attention upon the Mass that followed. It was the Mass of the Expectation of Our Lady, which is always said exactly one week before Christmas,—a day when in Catholic countries all women, rich and poor, who are going to bear children, make a point of hearing Mass and praying for a safe delivery. In a few days Our Lady would be preparing to go that three days' journey to Bethlehem, quietly submitting to undergo the fatigues of that rough travelling to a place that was to deny her any shelter except that of a rude stable. One thought of her waiting with an eagerness never equalled by any other expectant mother, to behold the Face of that One Who was to be her Son as well as her God. All through her mystical preparation she perhaps dreamed of what He would be like Who was to be more beautiful than all the sons of men. . .

Bethlehem . . The House of Bread. . . *I am the Living Bread that came down from Heaven.* . .

When Mass was over Audrey still lingered. The quiet and peace of that hour were too beautiful to be foregone. The little white-washed church, bare

and poorly furnished, yet held her Redeemer as surely as did that stable at Bethlehem. He asked for one's poverty as well as for one's riches. He wanted all . . . dearth as well as plenty, so only, that it were given with love and in faith. . .

The congregation that week-day morning was a small one. Just a few people too old, perhaps, to work, a woman or two, a handful of children. There was an old man who coughed, an old woman who ceaselessly muttered. But they were all held together in the brotherhood of the bond of faith. Here was the true democracy,—the equality of all in the eyes of Christ. He did not ask of His followers that they should be well-born, highly educated, intelligent, wealthy. If you possessed these things it was only that you might use them in His service. In the wide Courts of Heaven birth gives no precedence, the golden key of wealth opens no doors to the suppliant. . . The first shall be last. . . Couldn't Kemp see that? Why did he not use his gifts—his very real gifts—of eloquence and power to fight for the Faith? Nothing else seemed so well worth the conflict. . .

She rose to her feet, gathered up her books, aware that the problems of her present life were beginning once more to sway and possess her thoughts. She went quietly out of the church into the road beyond, and then turned into Summer Street. Suddenly, she heard a step behind her, and turning she came face to face with Adam Kemp. How tall he looked, and gaunt. Her heart beat a little faster at the sight of him and the colour rose to her face. She was annoyed because he had evidently purposely contrived to meet her, to accost her. She was angry with herself, too, because she was not really displeased with him. . .

Then her thoughts flew to Hubert. If he chanced to hear of it he would assuredly think that the encounter had been deliberately planned. He would be very angry. . . . Audrey would have walked away from Kemp then, but it would have been useless. They were too near to each other not to exchange ordinary greetings.

Kemp took the hand she held out to him.

"I will walk with you till we get outside the town," he said, in a loud, rather brusque tone.

"No, please not," said Audrey nervously, "I came alone and I can go back alone."

"You might be recognized—"

"It isn't likely. No one knows me here by sight except yourself and Hubert."

"All the same, it is safer not to risk it after what happened last night."

She looked up at him swiftly.

"What did happen last night?"

Even as she spoke she felt an odd sinking at the heart. It was something that perhaps affected Hubert, something connected with his hurried exit after dinner.

"A man was killed. Rather horribly. Faulty machinery—the old story. But I'll spare you the horrors of it. Tressider had been warned—I imagine he jibbed at the expense." His voice held a consummate scorn that flicked Audrey like a whip.

"You wrong my brother," she said indignantly, and she went on ahead quickly. Kemp caught her up and strode along by her side, a tall imposing figure.

"I only wish for your sake that I were wronging him! The men were utterly out of hand, which served him right."

Audrey walked on silently. The raw, cold air nipped her face. She felt cold and exhausted and

nervous. Why would he not leave her? Why did he persist in accompanying her, abusing Hubert the while? And Hubert—was it true that he knew? Was it true that he was guilty of negligence, so that a man had died—horribly? She felt a little sick.

"Do not, please, come with me any further, "she said at last. "I—I prefer to go alone!"

"If you don't wish to be seen with me—and if that is the case, I perfectly understand your point of view—I will walk behind you. But I will not let you go alone." There was decision in his tone. He made her feel his power, his indomitable will. She made a last effort when they reached the end of Summer Street, and turned their faces towards the bleak, open country beyond Millborough.

"Why should you want to guard Hubert Tressider's sister from any possible danger?" She flung the words at him defiantly, and not until they were uttered did she realize their full significance.

Adam hesitated. Then he said. "You're right there. I am inconsistent—like all men when they are dealing with a woman!" But as he spoke he let his eyes dwell full and squarely upon her face, and there was whimsical humour, not devoid of tenderness, in his expression.

Something in his tone as well as in the look he had bestowed upon her, warned her not to pursue that line of argument. Audrey, feeling helpless, walked on without further remonstrance. Even their discussion—the truths they had flung at each other—seemed to have brought them into a curious intimacy. She felt that she knew him a great deal better than she knew Hubert. Of course she hated him—almost—this morning, for the bitter and cruel things he had said. But his odd solicitude for her own safety could not leave her quite indifferent.

The tall, gaunt figure stalked beside her in silence; his footsteps, regular, rhythmical, rang out on the pavements. Nor did he attempt to leave her till the town was well behind them, and the roofs and chimneys of Millborough Hall were visible across the fields.

"Did your brother tell you anything about last night?"

She shook her head. "No—after you went I didn't see him again."

Kemp stopped. "I think you are safe now. If I were you I should not go to Mass on these dark mornings."

"I always go, and I'm not afraid."

He put out his hand and took hers and held it while he said:

"There's an ugly spirit abroad in Millborough. Good-bye, Miss Tressider."

"Good-bye," said Audrey.

Now that he had left her, she hurried home as rapidly as possible. It was already past nine o'clock, and she had no idea when Hubert breakfasted, nor indeed, whether he took that meal alone or expected her to be present. She arrived at the house almost breathless, and rang the bell. Jones, the man servant, opened the door and she could not help perceiving an ill-suppressed surprise on his face. But he only said:

"Mr. Tressider's having breakfast, miss. He's been inquiring for you."

Audrey went straight into the dining-room, not attempting to take off her coat and hat first. Hubert was sitting alone, the newspaper propped up in front of him.

"Why, Audrey," he said in a tone of irritable surprise, "where on earth have you been to at this hour? I don't care to have my sister roaming all over the

place alone. You might at least have told me! No one knew in the least where you were."

"I have been to Mass. Hubert. I . . I always go. . ."

"Mass? But how on earth did you find the church? You don't know your way."

"Mr. Kemp told me," said Audrey, taking her seat at the table and pouring out some coffee.

"Kemp?" His face darkened. "Oh, last night, I suppose."

"I had heard he was a Catholic, so I asked him. I thought he would be sure to know."

"He is indeed an ornament to your Faith," said Hubert, dryly. "But I wish to speak to you about last night, Audrey. I was extremely annoyed to find him alone with you in the drawing-room—you were talking when I came in just as if you were old friends. Jones ought to have known better. I always see these men in my study. I don't wish you to know Kemp. There is, indeed, no earthly reason why you ever should. He does not belong to your world. He is a man of low origin and he is perfectly unscrupulous, as that kind of person so often is. Some day he will get himself into trouble!"

Audrey shrank a little before those hard, pitiless, steel-bright eyes. She did not speak, and she checked an insensate desire to defend Kemp against her brother's hard words. . .

"You must be hungry after your walk. You'll find eggs and fish on the sideboard."

Having said this Hubert returned to his paper. As he read it he seemed to forget Audrey's presence, and every now and then an angry muttered ejaculation broke from him. This ignoring of her presence made the girl feel like an intruder. Hubert did not want her. She was disturbing his solitude. She was always doing things he didn't like. Harm-

less things, judged by ordinary standards . . . such as talking alone with Kemp in the drawing-room. It was absurd to object to that. She wished she had had more courage to defend her own actions.

Yet he had asked her to come. . . . Perhaps he was sorry now. It wouldn't be easy, living at Millborough. . . . Fortunately, Hubert knew nothing of her meeting with Kemp that morning. She hoped he would not question her too closely.

He looked up abruptly from his paper.

"I wonder what you will find to do all day? I suppose you have occupations of a kind? I don't care for you to wander about these country roads alone. But if you want to go into Millborough to shop, or anything of that sort, you can have the car, and you could pick me up on your way home."

"Thank you, Hubert." Her voice was meek enough. "I'm sure I shall find heaps to do. I've brought lots of books to read—there was hardly any time to read them in London. And to-day I must unpack and get settled. And isn't there a little room I could make into a den of my own? The drawing-room's so big. Then I could arrange my books in it, and perhaps have a piano."

The suggestion seemed reasonable enough and Hubert answered in quite a kind tone:

"I'll speak to Jones this morning and see what can be done."

Yes, she should have her own sitting-room. There was a charming south-room on the first floor with an outlook upon the garden. The very thing! . . . Upstairs there would be little chance of her running against Kemp and his like. He didn't like to think of her civility and courtesy to Kemp. So friendly—they were sitting there, conversing on perfectly equal terms last night! Audrey was young, but she must learn to discriminate. He felt

quite capable of teaching her. And he would speak to Lady Ince about it. Unfortunately Lady Ince persisted in knowing Kemp—even received him at her house—just because the man was a Catholic, and a careless one. . .

Hubert rose from the table with a frown on his face.

"Lunch is at one, but don't wait for me. I'm not often late."

He went out of the room. Audrey finished her breakfast. Hubert had unfortunately taken the newspaper away with him. And she had wanted to read it, to learn about the happenings of the previous night. The thought made her shiver, just as Kemp's allusion to it had made her shiver.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE BOW ROAD

AUDREY was young, and she had lived abroad too much not to adapt herself easily to changed and novel circumstances. It was harder to do this in Millborough, perhaps, than in any of the places of her former experience; the effort cost her from the first a little suffering, but she was determined not to fail.

Her whole energies during those first days were centred upon the determination to please Hubert. Aware that she was bringing a perfectly novel and somewhat disturbing element into his life, she resolved that he should feel it as little as possible. The present task of adjustment was not wholly unattractive. But the change for her was an abrupt one, and especially since in that bachelor household there were few of the comforts to which she had been acustomed.

She soon discovered that she had no power to change anything. She must try to fit in with the prevailing austerities which were oddly enough combined with a wasteful extravagance. She was a cipher in the household. Jones and his wife, who had been in Hubert's service for twelve years, reigned supreme, and would have regarded any innovation as revolutionary. Her position was that of a visitor, staying in the house more or less permanently. The length of her sojourn depended upon Hubert's pleasure. If she offended him she felt certain that he would send her away, back, perhaps, to Mrs. Corby's. This prospect was distasteful to her, she could not exactly tell why, for she loved her aunt, and despite the disparity in their ages she

had a great deal in common with her. But she had a strong feeling—never stronger than during those first days—that Millborough could teach her many lessons. Hard, difficult lessons, perhaps, taught with not a little severity and suffering. She was prepared for that. Something of the very ease and complicated luxury of Mrs. Corby's house might have offended in her a remote love of austerity that so often characterizes youth almost unconsciously. Audrey wanted to acquire knowledge and experience —even if the lesson caused her suffering.

Already she was aware that Millborough had stirred within her more vital and passionate interest in life. She did not deceive herself on the point. It was not Hubert's doing; it was Kemp's. Since that morning when he had met her outside the church and accompanied her part of the way home, she had not seen him. At first, she had been relieved not to find him there again, gaunt and commanding and authoritative, in the little grey street. But when a few mornings had passed thus an ill-defined disappointment seemed inconsistently to possess her. Perhaps he too saw the absurdity of troubling about the safety of Tressider's sister.

Above all Audrey wished to help Hubert, practically, substantially. She wanted to help him in such manner that people should have no grounds upon which to attack him. Only then would Adam Kemp and his increasing band of followers cease their fierce onslaughts. . .

Faulty machinery. . . And he had been warned. . . If that were truly the case it must never be permitted to happen again. She, with her fresh vision, impartial, truth-loving, would discern many things, and warn Hubert. He was too busy, too pre-occupied, to attend to every little detail. But surely when it was a vital question, concerning

the safety of life and limb, he would listen and act. . .

Hubert, obstinate, silent, coldly revengeful. Like their mother, unsympathetic, antagonistic. . . And Kemp, trying to sway and influence her, working to enlist her sympathy. . . She fought hard against the growing influence of Kemp upon her life. This desire to see him—to know the worst of what he was saying and doing against Hubert, to try with her puny force to restrain him . . . these were things to be combated.

But Kemp, although he did not appear again to escort her home on those dark, winter mornings, had by no means forgotten Audrey, nor had it been altogether easy for him to keep away. He was conscious of having brought pressure to bear upon himself. There was a chivalrous spot in his nature—a weak spot he sometimes scornfully termed it—and Audrey had touched it. His absence could, however, have been accounted for in another manner, for two or three days after her arrival in Millborough he had received a letter from his sister Jane, urging him to come to London. Rachel was very ill, and the doctor most strongly advised her removal to a sanatorium on the Cotswold hills. Questions of expense had arisen, and Adam's advice and co-operation were necessary.

He was not altogether displeased to have a decent excuse for leaving Millborough just then. His duties in regard to the newspaper were merely nominal at the moment; there was little or nothing doing, and the editor always preferred to do nearly all the work himself. Adam's articles which appeared about three times a week were prepared for some time to come. It was not difficult for him, therefore, to obtain leave and journey to London to see his sisters.

The Kemps had lived as children in the small, drab-coloured house facing the Bow Road, still inhabited by Jane and Rachel. After the death of their parents, Adam had been brought up by his elder sister. At sixteen he had broken free and had gone to Millborough, where he had worked for a couple of years in a factory. Brilliant, and with a natural gift for writing, his verses and articles, published in a Millborough paper long since defunct, had attracted the notice of a rich and eccentric man in the neighbourhood. He took Adam forthwith away from the factory, domiciled him in his own house, and engaged a tutor to coach him for Oxford. After a year or so of this life, a changed Adam went to Oxford. He had a brilliant career there, and all traces of the factory-hand vanished forever. But the remembrance of those days had inspired him to use his gifts for the amelioration of the lives of those former fellow-workers. Prosperity had taught him no false shame for those early, striving, penurious days; on the contrary, he was proud of them, though grateful to the hand that had lifted him from the slough and given him an honourable place in the world. His benefactor, who had been a Catholic, died leaving him the sum of two hundred a year. The rest of his money and property was bequeathed to Catholic charities. But the sum was almost wealth to Kemp, and it enabled him to help his sisters, especially Rachel, very substantially.

The house in Bow Road was built of bricks and much weather-worn, and now imbued with an extremity of dinginess. It had three stories of which the top one was let. The windows looking upon the street were carefully screened by white curtains of coarse Nottingham lace. Outside in the busy thoroughfare trams, omnibuses, huge drays, and an occasional funeral cortège on its way to Leytonstone,

clattered past over the rough cobble-stones. On the pavements an endless procession of people of all kinds and of many nationalities, passed, jaded and weary. To this scene painted in dull, uncompromising monochrome, the weird and grotesque accoutrements of some of the funerals lent a curious effect of deep, arresting black which with odd paradox had almost the colour-value of a splash of scarlet.

Adam Kemp's tall form strode eastward along the Bow Road. The sordid thoroughfare, unfrequented by fashionable London until the motor-car suddenly introduced people to strange metropolitan fastnesses, was well-known to him. He had been born and bred there. He could remember going to the Catholic school with his sisters. He could easily reconstruct in imagination the great class-room where he and half a hundred other urchins, thin, ill-nourished and often hungry, received their first difficult lessons. He could remember the old school-master, an object of terror to him in those first days. He could feel the sharp, stinging thud of the cane descending unexpectedly upon his small, cold, chilblained hands for some trifling act of inattention. He could recall his own fierce indignation at the pain which seemed so out of all proportion to the childish offence. He could remember, too, the black-board, the maps, the arithmetic which he hated, the history and geography which he loved. They alone seemed to transport him into a new world. It was in those very early days that he first discovered for himself the enchantment of books. Thenceforward he read and read, cramming his small head with knowledge useful and the reverse. He was barely sixteen when he went to Millborough, and entered that strenuous, penurious life, where all leisure was denied to him. Those two years—they remained in his memory as if he had

served a sentence of hard-labour in prison. And then the wonderful escape, which was so to change his life, had come. But it had taken him very forcibly in more ways than one, away from the Bow Road. He had risen in the world, and Jane and Rachel had remained as they were, two respectable women of the working-class, able to read and write, and blessed—or cursed—with no ambition to add to this scanty stock of knowledge. They were proud of Adam, although they were a little afraid of him. He seemed to them so "grand," so very much the "gentleman."

Kemp crossed the road, threading his way delicately amid the intricate traffic. Then he paused for a moment and stared up at the house, with its smudged, discoloured bricks, its lace curtains. Every time he came it seemed to have shrunk a little, almost as if it were ashamed of its own unlovely existence. But Adam liked the old place. He was proud of its ancient connection with his family. His father had bought it long before his marriage at a time of temporary prosperity more than fifty years ago. Thither he had brought his young bride, a girl from a Sussex farm, pretty, golden-haired, and more than a little afraid of her elderly husband with his black hair and eyes, his fitful, passionate temper. Adam remembered his father but vaguely; he had died when he was about twelve years old, and his mother had died a couple of years later. It was due to the energy and courage of Jane that the little home had been kept together through the years of acute, financial stress that followed their parents' death.

Adam pushed open the door; it was never locked in the day-time. The walls were panelled but much of the brown paint had been knocked off, and the place was so dark that anyone unfamiliar with the narrow, winding stairs could hardly have groped up

them in safety. A nervous person might have feared dangers lurking unseen in those shadowy corners, and indeed it would have been perfectly easy for anyone bent on felony to conceal himself there undetected.

For half an hour or more Jane Kemp had been watching for Adam. He was late, and she knew by experience that in any case he would not remain with them very long. She was a hard-featured woman with an indomitable will and a sharp tongue. She was about forty years old but looked much more, and she wore a dress of shabby black. Her appearance was not neat, there were buttons missing in front of her bodice, and her dun-coloured hair strayed down upon her neck in dry wisps.

"Adam's late," she said. There was a cockney intonation in her voice which did not quite conceal the soft Sussex burr. "He said he'd be here by three."

"It's gone three," said Rachel Todd, who was lying upon a couch drawn close to a small, inadequate fire, for the room was piercingly cold. She was almost pretty in a delicate, faded fashion, and in her large dark eyes there was some resemblance to her brother. Her thin hands rested idly upon the cotton counterpane of faded blue which Jane had thrown over her. She was terribly emaciated, and her face wore a look of acquiescent suffering that was pathetic. "You'll make him speak to Jim?" she went on. "It isn't fair on you and Addie to let you do it all."

She twisted her wedding-ring round her thin finger; it hung loosely. Jane watched her. . . . Her sister's malady came not only from the privations and sufferings of her married life, but from the lack of proper nourishment in her childhood. Had she been taken away from the East End in her girlhood

and fed upon the flesh-pots of Egypt, it is doubtful if, even then, she would ever have quite lost the pinched, starved look which is ineradicable in the denizens of those crowded courts and lanes, among the people who dwell perpetually on the "hunger-line."

The prosperity of the elder Kemps had dwindled after the birth of Adam, and by the time Rachel came into the world their fortunes were perhaps at their lowest ebb. This accounted in large measure for the malnutrition of their youngest child, and for the early breakdown in her health. The completion of this physical débacle could be accredited without hesitation to the ill-treatment she had received at the hands of her violent, drunken husband, Jim Todd.

"It's my belief he could talk to Jim for a week and still get nuffin' out of him," said the elder sister with a snort. "He's jes' as hard as nails." She tapped the table fiercely. "That's wood, ain't it, Rachie? And that's not harder than Jim's heart towards his wedded wife. He'll say 'All right,' but will he do anything to help yer? Not Jim."

"He's forgetful," pleaded Jim's wife, who had not yet wholly been able to forget the love of the girl Rachel for the boy Jim. It dated back to their school-days.

"Forgetful! I like that! When he's nearly done you in more than once!" Jane gave another and more prolonged snort.

"Oh, that was a long time ago," said Rachel. "And he was very sorry afterwards. He kept quite steady for six months."

"Well, Addie's got to make him pay up this time, and no mistake about it," said Jane, who was getting ready for the encounter between Adam and Jim, and was sharpening her chief weapon in preparation

for it. "He's got good work, Jim has, and he can't leave his wife without a bob."

"He won't pay a penny unless I go back to him," said Rachel, "and I really can't do that—I'm too ill." To return to Jim was scarcely a course that could commend itself to a woman who was dying of consumption, and had but a few months to live.

"And I've no patience with Addie neither," continued Jane, who could remember the days when as the eldest child of the family she had ruled Adam with a rod of iron, "he's that took up with his fine friends, and with writing all this poetry, which I'll be bound no one ever reads!"

No, Adam who had not been near them for the last six months was not to be let off too lightly this afternoon. Jane was in a belligerent mood.

"Ah, you may say what you like Jane, but the world does recognize genius," said Rachel. She was rather sentimentally inclined, and Adam's verses appealed to her with their strong simplicity, their power and lucidity. She kept a copy always by her, but she hid it whenever Jane approached her. In her adoring eyes Adam was the greatest poet who had ever lived. "I do hope he hasn't forgotten about coming, Jane, for Jim'll be put out if he comes all that way and doesn't find him."

She would be safer, too, if Adam were there, but loyalty to Jim restrained her from saying so.

Despite her own miserable lot, she frequently found herself pitying Jane for being a spinster.

"Here comes Addie," said Jane, moving from her place by the window and taking the kettle off the fire. She poured some water into the tea-pot, and the little hissing sound it made was a welcome one to Rachel who looked forward to a strong cup of tea brewed by Jane. Jane handled the things clumsily, and she spilled some of the water on the

clean table-cloth she had put out in honour of Adam. For, of course, in those great houses to which his genius admitted him people had things "nice."

"How do you feel to-night, Rachie?" she asked, coming over to her sister's couch.

"Much better, thank you, Jane. You know it always cheers me when I know Addie's coming."

The hard face bending over her lost the look of tenderness that had for a second almost transformed it. A jealous anger burned in Jane's dull eyes. She slaved year in and year out for Rachel, this poor invalid sister practically deserted by her husband, starving herself often that the fastidious appetite might be humoured, and this was her reward. Rachel felt better because Adam was coming. . . . The glad look in her hollow eyes. . . . The smile on the pale mouth. The faint flush in those emaciated cheeks. . . . All for Adam, who so rarely came to see them. No doubt he found the Bow Road "dreadfully far away" . . .

Now they could hear his step on the stair, eager, impetuous, as it had been when he was a boy. Then the door opened and he came in, looking strangely prosperous and vigorous in those sordid surroundings. He carried a parcel in one hand and a bunch of flowers in the other. The scent of violets, of hothouse roses, filled the little room with unwonted fragrance.

"There you are Rachie," he said by way of greeting, and then he kissed them both in turn, wondering a little why Jane so seldom washed her face. But he lingered over the embrace he bestowed upon Rachel, and a softer look came into his eyes. In his own way he loved Rachel more than anyone in the world.

Rachel took the flowers and held them to her face, revelling in their perfume. Adam never forgot

to bring her flowers, and these were surely fit for a queen's nosegay.

"Come and have some tea, Addie," said Jane. She pulled a chair close to the table for him and Adam took it with a hint of reluctance. She pushed a cup of tea towards him, and Adam stirred its contents, wishing he had the courage to refuse it. He seldom took tea, and particularly he detested the strong, sweet brew which his sisters preferred.

This little room was associated with those long years of his childhood. He had not been happy there, and always he had hated its dismal, sordid outlook. The poverty that is clean and bare and simple, he loved and would willingly endure, but the lack of fresh air, the dusty curtains, the accumulation of rubbish that crowded the shelves, were each a separate annoyance to him. One of his bitterest poems had described that home of his childhood, and few of those who read and admired that strange, powerful effusion dreamed that it had been inspired by his own early surroundings.

Coming straight from Millborough where he dwelt, it is true, in a narrow street, he could not but feel the contrast to his own decent, clean surroundings, bare, simply furnished, scrupulously kept. Here the soiled lace curtains, the dusty floor, with its worn and unswept carpet, the thick, chipped cups, the lump of butter thrust upon a plate, and with but the one common knife for its use, the forlorn remains of a loaf, the penetrating smell of the little oil-lamp, all contrived to fill him with a sense of nausea. But his face was well under control, for he knew by experience that Jane was always ready to seize upon the slightest pretext for telling him that since he had risen in the world he despised his sisters and his old home.

But Jane, aggressively sensitive, knew perfectly well what was in his mind. She had not not seen him for some months, and she could not but perceive there was a great change in him. It was that indescribable change that affects the personality and even the appearance of all men and women who have tasted—perhaps after long striving—the sweets of success. She saw in Adam now the man whose genius was recognized, admired, praised. He had an assured place in the world. He had always from a boy possessed a certain charm of manner, and this was now accentuated. He spoke no more the language of the London streets. His clothes, for all their aspect of loose negligence, fitted him well. He was handsome, if a trifle forbidding-looking. Jane felt at once proud and a little afraid of him. But she was not going to show her fear. She was quite prepared to give it to him "straight from the shoulder," if she thought it necessary. She had made of "plain-speaking" almost a religion, as both Adam and Jim knew to their cost. But she was good, unselfish, industrious. She would have worked her fingers to the bone for Rachel. She sat up with her night after night when the fits of coughing were very bad. She denied herself for Rachel, just as if she had been her mother, rather than her sister.

The signs of increased prosperity in Adam disturbed her a little. His linen, she grudgingly admitted to herself, was a picture. Therefore, his gift of flowers as well as that of fruit and cakes which he produced from the parcel and set upon the table rather shyly, became contemptible in Jane's eyes. She strained and saved to procure little luxuries for Rachel, and now she believed that he could have provided them without effort. Nevertheless, she filled a hideous, blue vase with water and put the roses and violets into it, setting it down on a

table near Rachel. It made a brilliant spot of colour in the little, drab room, and Rachel, who had a passion for pretty things and something of her brother's poetical nature—though in her case it was utterly undeveloped—feasted her eyes upon the scented loveliness of the flowers.

An awkward silence followed. Kemp was never much of a talker unless he were discoursing upon congenial themes, and he seldom had much to say to Jane at any time.

He sat there stirring his tea, while Jane watched him with a grim little smile, wondering if he would leave it untasted. But he was too wise for that, and presently he lifted the cup to his lips. He was a little afraid of this hard, rough, elder sister. She made him, at times, unpleasantly aware that he still possessed a conscience, especially where the things of his religion were concerned. Under her roof he had even compelled himself, and not so very long ago either, to eat amorphous pieces of fried fish on a Friday. Oddly enough she sometimes reminded him of Lady Ince. The two women were really as the poles apart, but their lives held the same immutable, fundamental principle, fixed as the eternal stars. They would both have died for their Faith, Lady Ince joyfully, Jane grimly. . . .

Adam drank his tea and wished that Jane would leave off watching him. It made him feel nervous.

CHAPTER X

JIM TODD

"WELL, Addie—you haven't got much to say for yourself," said Jane at last, and her voice was distinctly aggressive. "Lost your tongue to-day?"

The question took him back twenty-five years when she had frequently admonished him in those very terms, for the sulky silence in which he used sometimes to take refuge.

Before he could speak Rachel interposed nervously. She did not want them to quarrel. When Jim arrived they must all three show an undivided and harmonious front.

"Tell us what you've been doing," she said. "You know we haven't seen you for ever so long. Why I was still with Jim when I saw you last. And I left him six months ago."

She dated everything from that final rupture with Jim.

"You see I can very seldom get away from Millborough," he said, aware that while Rachel would eagerly accept his excuses, Jane would be little likely to do so in her present carping mood. "And I haven't much time for writing letters either."

"But you do like Millborough, don't you, Addie?" said Rachel.

"I like my work there," he answered; "the place is, of course, detestable. As dark and dirty as—as London."

It was mere talk, but it sufficed.

"And they—the people there—know what a great poet you are?" said Rachel, letting her eyes rest proudly upon Adam.

He stretched out his hand and touched hers in a way that brought a quick flush to her face.

"I don't know about great. But they know—at least a great many of them do—that I've written verses."

He did not quite know why, but the face of Audrey Tressider flashed suddenly across his thoughts. Did she know? And had she read them? He put the thought quickly from him, almost as if it held a subtle, delicious poison.

"Ah, your poetry's a fine thing, Addie," said Mrs. Todd. "I can say a lot of it off by heart. I was always one for learning poetry."

"You're prejudiced, dear," he said, but his eyes softened. "By the way, where's Jim? Isn't he coming?"

"He isn't here yet," said Jim's wife.

Kemp took out his watch. "It's nearly half past four," he said. "Didn't you tell him to come at four?"

"We asked you both to be here at half past three," said Jane, shutting her grim mouth with a snap.

"My train was late," said Adam. "I came straight here from the station. And I've got a meeting I must attend to-night. I'm due back at Millborough to-morrow."

"I hoped you would be in London for Christmas, Addie," said Rachel, "then we could have spent it together, same as we used to."

"Im sorry I couldn't do that in any case. I'm asked to stay with a—friend outside Millborough for Christmas. She has a chapel in her house—there'll be Midnight Mass."

"In a private chapel? How lovely," said Rachel envying him.

"Some of your fine friends, I suppose!" said Jane. "Well, I wish you joy of them, Addie." She was always jealously distrustful of his social doings, partly because he so rarely talked about them. "Do you ever tell them about Rachel and me? Do you think they'd come to tea with us?" She gave a sarcastic giggle which jarred his nerves to such an extent that he could hardly control his anger.

But he did not wish—for poor Rachel's sake—to quarrel with Jane to-day.

"You see. . ." he stammered eagerly and with an almost boyish confusion, "we generally talk of other things—Millborough things, for example. I've told them I have an invalid sister—they often ask after you, Rachie, but their lives aren't like yours—ours. . ."

"Invalid sister!" Jane threw back her head with this time a quite prolonged snort, "and do they know you've got a sister who goes out to work at ten shillings a week, and scrubs till she can hardly see?"

A dull flush came over the pallor of Adam's face.

"I have often told you, Jane, that I'm perfectly ready to provide for you and Rachel, so that you can give up that drudgery. But you have always said that you prefer to remain independent, so I've only sent you enough for Rachel, since she came to live with you. I'm sorry—I hate to think you're wearing yourself out like that."

He had finished his tea, was grateful to Jane for not suggesting that he should have a second cup, and now he came back to Rachel's couch and sat down near her.

"And I'm afraid that too much of what I *am* able to send goes to Jim, doesn't it?" he said, playing with her loose wedding ring.

Rachel coloured nervously. "He was out of work so long, and he came around saying he'd just had

the influenza. But he's got good work now, Jim has."

In olden days Adam and Jim had fought many a hard battle on the asphalt play-ground of the Catholic school. And Jim had often come off victor, and thrashed his opponent pretty severely. Adam, slender and delicate as a boy, had not had the stamina to resist long. But he was swift to anger in those days, and roused Jim's fury by his own ungovernable temper.

"It's hard to refuse him, when he does come," continued Rachel, who, despite the severe ill-treatment she had received at his hands, still cherished a certain forgiving tenderness for her "man." Nevertheless, the advent of Jim Todd was by no means an unmixed blessing to the two sisters.

"When he comes he just threatens it out of you, I suppose," said Adam. His words were harsh, but the eyes that looked at Rachel were full of pity. She was so frail—it was a wonder that Jim had not killed her when he had, according to the parlance of Whitechapel, "knocked her about."

"Ah, you were always hard on Jim, Addie," said Rachel with a faint smile.

"Well, what does the doctor say?" asked Adam.

Last week he had paid for Rachel to have the advice of a well-known specialist, and it was in connection with this that he had been obliged to make the journey to town. The physician had said that change of air was imperative, and he thought a sanatorium would be beneficial.

"He wants me to go to this place on the Cotswold Hills," said Rachel. "There's a farmer's wife who'd take me in. It isn't a regular place for consumption, but I could have the open air treatment, and plenty of milk and butter."

"The Cotswolds!" said Adam. "And would you let this, Jane?"

"Im not going to leave London," said Jane; "it's better for Rachie to go alone. She'll be well looked after, and I shan't lose my bit of work. If she got worse I could go to her. But she ain't going to get worse—are you Rachie? You're to get plump and bonny again."

"If Jim helps, I will," said Adam. "It's only fair he should pay something towards his wife's maintenance."

"Catch Jim!" said Jane, with a sniff, "and here he is so you can talk to him yourself, and you can talk till you're black in the face," she added in a sullen undertone.

For at that moment the door of the little room opened, and Jim Todd's face was thrust round the edge of it while he made a preliminary survey of the occupants, just to get an idea of the "lie of the land," as he would have expressed it.

The *conseil de famille,* convoked, as he firmly believed, to extort a portion of his own hard-earned wages from him, had awakened within his breast fiercely belligerent feelings towards his wife and her family, especially towards Adam, whom he believed to be "rolling." He was a man of about thirty-four, young-looking for his age, with a coarse, red face that bore signs of dissipation, and scant, reddish hair. He was very powerfully built, had the strong chest and arms of a prize-fighter. He did not remove his hat which he wore slightly on one side. A red handkerchief round his throat afforded the usual substitute for a collar.

He went up to Rachel and kissed her, a proceeding which made Kemp shudder involuntarily. Then he shook hands in turn with Jane and Adam.

"Wull, brother Addie, 'ow's yerself?"

"I'm very well, thank you," said Kemp, stiffly.

"We were just talking about Rachel having to go away into the country," said Jane, coming to the point at once with a firmness of purpose that won the unspoken admiration of both men, "and we should like to know how much you can contribute towards the expense. We can get her taken in at a farm for fifteen shillings a week—and she'll need extra comforts and things that'll bring it up pretty well to a pound."

"She can 'ave her extry comforts along o' me at my place," said Jim, in a loud, rough, quarrelling tone.

He had prepared and fortified himself for the interview with copious draughts of gin, and he felt perfectly equal to "tackling them all," as he mentally expressed it.

"I ain't a blooming toff," he continued, eyeing Adam's attire with contempt, "I ain't going to pay fifteen bob a week for a wife as has left me. Ain't got it. No, nor yut fifteen pence!"

"You are in work again I hear," said Adam in an icy tone. "We know perfectly well that you can pay. And it's greatly your doing that poor Rachel has come to this pass."

"Ain't got it, I tell yer! And if I 'ad I wouldn't give it. Let Rachie come back 'ome and I'll see to her extry comforts." He gave a loud, coarse laugh, and Rachel dissolved into tears.

She was afraid of Jim; her flesh shrank from his touch. She remembered the night when he had come home drunk and nearly killed her. The pain—the terror of it . . the smarting blows that at last became more merciful since they produced unconsciousness, a blessed oblivion from which she had awakened to find herself in the hospital. . .

"Rachel needs fresh air. She'll die if she stays here," said Jane harshly.

"Wull, she can 'ave fresh air down at my place in Grigg's Court, then," said Jim implacably.

"I am not asking you to pay all," said Adam in a scathing, lofty tone, "but you can't let your wife die before your eyes and do nothing to help save her."

"Ain't got fifteen bob a week," repeated Todd, stolidly.

"What are you doing now?" inquired Adam impatiently.

"Dock-' and," replied Todd laconically, "but I was out o' work a longish bit when I cum out of 'orspital arter my last fight."

Adam looked at him with a repulsion he made no effort to conceal, and wondered afresh how Rachel, who was naturally refined, could have married such a brute. Possibly he overlooked the fact that at the time of their marriage twelve years ago Jim was a likely enough lad, and rather the hero of the Kemps' small set of friends, by reason of his athletic prowess. He had had a careful bringing-up, had been an altar-boy in the neighbouring Catholic church, was well thought of by the priests of the mission. But—as in, alas, so many cases—he had drifted away after leaving school, had become careless about his religion. It had been hoped that an early marriage with a good and devout girl like Rachel Kemp, to whom he was passionately attached, might save him. But drink, poverty, and a violent temper of the fighting sort had been the undoing of him. He had served a term of imprisonment for that assault on his wife. He was scarcely recognizable now as the youth Rachel had married.

"I want to know how much you are prepared to give," said Adam.

"Now don't you start in jawin'," said Todd with sudden ferocity. "Wot I 'evn't got I 'evn't got and

you can't 'ave it. No nor Rachel neither. You know that, too, don't you, my duckie?"

Jane watched the little scene, like a tigress ready to spring.

She could not have told which of the two men she despised more, Adam with his consciously superior air, openly disdainful of all, or Todd with his coarse offensiveness.

"Now don't you two quarrel," she said harshly, "Rachel isn't fit for it. If you're going to make a row you can go and make it in the street. Comes to this, Jim, if you can't pay, she must go to the cold-ward at the Infirmary."

"I'll pay fifteen shillings a week and her journey, and you must find the other five, Jim," said Adam resolutely.

"Not if I knows it, brother Addie," said Jim with offensive jocularity.

"I'll give fifteen shillings a week," repeated Adam firmly.

"Yer'll miss it or yer tailor will," said Jim with a laugh. He stared boldly and insolently at Adam, as if examining in detail his well-cut clothes, polished boots, and spotless linen.

"And you've got to find that other five shillings," said Adam.

Jim threw himself into a chair as if exhausted by the discussion which he considered terminated.

"Can't do it." His voice was obdurate.

"Half a crown," said Jane firmly, "if I let another room I can give that."

"Am I a blooming fool?" said Jim.

The scene was getting on Adam's nerves. It was nearly five o'clock and his engagements prevented him from remaining much longer. Suddenly, the thought of Audrey Tressider, as he had seen her that first evening in her brother's house, came into

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his mind. The contrast between her and Rachel gave him a twinge of remorse, not unmixed with bitterness. He saw Audrey, charming, beautiful, dressed simply but in a manner that enhanced her loveliness. He remembered her glowing eyes, her soft voice, her eagerness to defend her brother. Todd's voice brought him swiftly back to earth, to the sordid conditions of the Bow Road domicile.

"I guess you and Jane'll have to settle that Glorstershire business between you," said Jim. "I'm a poor man and I can't afford those extry comforts." The phrase had caught his fancy, and he tried to imitate Adam's way of saying it. "Who'd uv thought you and I was at school together, Addie? I used ter lick yer then. Blowed if I couldn't do it again now if I was to try!"

Unbearable as he always was in Adam's eyes, he was especially odious when he became reminiscent.

"If you don't look out you'll be summoned for neglecting to maintain your wife, and then you'll have to pay ten shillings a week," said Adam.

Jim's face looked ugly then.

"Oh, yer'll 'ave the law of me, will yer, brother Addie?" he said.

"Certainly I will," said Kemp.

"I'll smash yer fice in for yer, if yer do."

He waved a menacing fist in the direction of Adam. Kemp shrugged his shoulders.

"Think it over, Jim," he said. "Rachel shall go next week in any case, and if you refuse to contribute, you shall have a touch of the law. Good-bye, Jane. Good-bye, Rachie." He kissed his sisters in turn, lingering a little over the embrace bestowed upon Rachel. "I must be pushing off now. I'll come up any day and take you down there, Rachie, so make all your plans. You'll be better, I know, directly you get away from here."

He nodded to Todd and then went out of the room.

Once outside in the street, he seemed to breathe more freely. It was raining heavily now, and a light north wind swept against his face with a touch of ice. But its glacial quality revived him. His anger against Todd had been carefully controlled, but it had burned hotly within him. It had all been so horrible—so much worse than he had anticipated—and he had become accustomed to a good deal. Todd was just the type of man that made his own work often seem so futile, the kind of person whom it was impossible to help. He himself had been brought up on precisely the same social level as Jim; he had lived in the life that his sisters now lived in the same environment. In that little house he had just left, his boyhood dreams had been dreamed. It was there that ambition had first touched him with her shining feather. It was there that he had first had that determination to try to lessen something of the appalling cruelty of the world. Cruelty of man to man, of man to woman, cruelty to children and helpless things, a mountain of unnecessary cruelty that led nowhither. The vision of it had obsessed him. He would use his pen in the service of this dream. He was not vain, but even as a lad he was aware of something of his own power to express in writing what he felt and thought.

But the social changes which education and a certain achievement in the world of letters had wrought in his life, seemed only in their first and most prominent effects to have arbitrarily severed him from the class from which he had sprung, while they had given him little sympathy for that into which he had been thrust. A gulf wider than the seas seemed to divide him now from such a man as Todd. He shrank from him in disgust. He had no pity for his failure,

for his degradation. And yet, when all was said and done, was it not just for the men of Todd's class for whom he was working with an energy, a diligence that took all his time and strength? His crusade against the "classes" was on behalf of such men as Jim. To raise them from the pit. . . It was always difficult, he told himself, to deal with entities. Todd happened to be of a low type, and he had sunk in the scale through his own folly and wickedness. Their early equipment had been precisely the same. He wondered then if Rachel were fully aware of the horror and degradation of her married life, or whether she would even now have returned to her husband had her health permitted it. The home he had to offer her in Grigg's Court was probably a single room, ten feet square, with half its furniture pawned. Would she have gone back, as a duty, to the rude orgies of Saturday night—to the drunkenness, the evil language, the blows, all of which things she had endured plentifully for eleven years? He hated to answer the question in the affirmative, but he could not disguise from himself the fact that Rachel had not entirely lost all affection for Jim. Yes, she would have gone back to him if she had been strong and well. But there was no place for a dying woman in the room at Grigg's Court. She would have thoughts, too, of reclaiming Jim, of bringing him back to the practice of his Faith. For he had failed there, too. Adam caught himself up sharply. In this respect he could throw no stones at Jim. He had done all his work from a philanthropic motive, never from a supernatural one. It was often unscrupulous, always unsanctified. . . He had neglected his spiritual life; he had not thought about it for years, until he had met Audrey Tressider coming out of the little Catholic church in Millborough. Strange to say, that meeting had de-

termined him to accept Lady Ince's invitation to spend Christmas with her. She was only going to have a few friends, she had told him, and, of course, unworldly though she was, she was not likely to commit the blunder of inviting him to meet the Tressiders.

His thoughts went back unwillingly to Todd. As a boy he had shared with Jim and others the playground of the streets. That in itself is a difficult thing from which to recover. Adam could remember how, when their mother died, Jane had toiled as a factory-hand to support him and Rachel until he was old enough to leave school. He had worked hard in those days—a thin, gaunt strip of a lad with white face and great dark eyes. Jane, who was without intellectual development, watched him with cynical interest; she regarded his thirst for knowledge—great even in those days—as a subtle form of idleness. Her ambition for him did not soar higher than that he should become a "van-boy," as soon after leaving school as possible. But Adam refused from the outset to follow this line of least resistance. He intended to work with his head rather than with his hands, and when Jane had tried to force this ignoble career upon him he had left home and gone down to Millborough, to join a friend who was working in a factory there. His subsequent history has already been recorded. He remembered as he hurried along the street this evening some words of advice his benefactor had once given him.

"I should keep away from the Bow Road if I were you. Keep clear, if you can, of the old environment. It's apt to spring up and throttle a man."

He did not speak without knowledge, for he had made an expedition once to see the house whence his protégé had sprung. He had not gone in, had avoided making the acquaintance of Jane, who was

then living there alone with Rachel, before the latter's marriage. He had been principally impressed by the large number of weird-looking funerals he had encountered on his way thither. It had happened to be a Saturday afternoon, and that is a convenient day for the journey to Leytonstone, as far as the survivors are concerned. His affection for Adam had prompted the expedition, and he had been surprised by the warmth with which Kemp had replied to his injunction.

"I shall never be able to keep clear of it, sir," he had said, "and I'm not sure that I shall ever want to. I'd rather not turn my back on anything that I've ever been or had."

Yes, he had said just those words; they came back to him now. And for the first time he realized, aghast, that there were things he wished to hide from one pair of eyes. From the eyes of Tressider's sister. . .

CHAPTER XI

LADY INCE'S TEA-PARTY

LADY INCE was giving a tea-party. She had had a few men staying in the house for the shooting during the week that immediately preceded Christmas, and she suddenly felt that she ought to do something, at least, for the amusement of their wives before they dispersed to their different homes.

They were having tea in the big hall at Abbot's End. It was a finely proportioned and lofty apartment with a gallery running above it. A big fire of logs blazed on the hearth, and the electric lights, skilfully arranged, illuminated the place with a glow of soft radiance.

Near the fire sat Gertrude Grazebrook, long slim, and so supple and sinuous that she looked almost boneless. While she could not be more than four and twenty she had a very experienced and sophisticated air. Her face was blanched as an almond, and she painted her full lips scarlet. Her eyes were green under black lashes, and her hair was the colour of a ripe chestnut. Near her stood her husband, Bertie Grazebrook, small, fair, weak-chinned, but amiable and adoring.

Those who had finished tea had drifted up into the gallery to look at the famous pictures, but Evangeline Standen had undertaken to act as their guide, so that her sister did not consider it necessary to move from her comfortable chair by the fire. She and her husband and sister and Lord Wanford were staying in the house.

"I have asked the Tressiders to come here for Midnight Mass this year," Lady Ince was saying; "you know, I always have a few people."

"The Tressiders?" Mrs. Grazebrook looked up quickly, "why I thought your dear Hubert lived quite alone."

"He has his sister staying with him, and I have asked him to bring her. I hope he will be able to do so." That she did not like the allusion to her "dear Hubert" was plainly evinced in the slightly stilted manner of her reply.

"Do you mean Audrey?" inquired Gertrude.

"Yes. You've met her, haven't you?"

"We had them to stay with us in Surrey," said Mrs. Grazebrook lazily, "Audrey and a perfectly charming boy called Ninian. He has gone to Africa with Myles Dorling, and I fully expect that they will both be eaten by lions. Do lions eat people? I always mix them up with tigers. Anyhow, I thought it a great mistake to let the boy go—he is almost a child. Audrey isn't bad-looking. By the way, Myles was rather sentimental about her. However, it does not seem to have come to anything. If I had been Mrs. Corby I should have encouraged it furiously."

"Well the girl has come to live with her brother, now," said Lady Ince. "She is a Catholic," she added, pensively.

"Fancy living with the Great Bear!" put in Bertie in a soft, insolent voice. "She won't like that much. She is a very pretty little girl indeed."

He took a sandwich from the table and nibbled it delicately.

"Do stop eating, Bertie," said his wife, "you are getting much too fat."

"But I've had no tea," protested Bertie, taking a sugared cake.

"You won't be able to sing a note. And you know you promised to sing."

"I shall sing like an angel after this delicious cake!"

"I wish you were a Catholic, like little Audrey Tressider. Then you would be obliged to fast on Fridays. Lady Ince, do try to convert him! You've been successful with so many people!" Mrs. Grazebrook leaned back in her chair and regarded her husband through half-closed eyelids. She knew that the conversation must be highly displeasing to Lady Ince, who took her religion very seriously indeed. The knowledge delighted her, for she had a strong spice of malice in her nature. She was also aware that she was shocking Mrs. Drane, the wife of the county member and a Low-Church woman. Mr. Drane—a man of rationalist views—considered the covert shooting at Abbot's End some of the finest in the country, but their annual visit was a source of acute torture to his wife, who regarded Lady Ince as a female Jesuit, and was not quite without the suspicion that an *oubliette* might some day open before her unwitting feet and swallow her up. She was fond of reading the experiences of *soi-disant* escaped nuns, and also the more lurid literature that deals with walled-up monks, and the sudden disappearance of persons hostile to Catholicism.

"I wish Evangeline would come down," said Mrs. Grazebrook, glancing up at the gallery as she spoke. "She is probably not looking at the pictures at all. When she and Sonya Vandom get together they talk of nothing but that man Kemp. I'm sorry to say Sonya encourages her. I hoped she was getting over it, and so did Toby."

Mrs. Drane pricked up her ears. Mrs. Grazebrook was often illuminating, and she never hesitated to discuss her sister or anyone else before strangers.

"If you ask me," said Bertie, "I believe that Toby is sick of the whole business. Who can blame him?

No really nice man would care to succeed Kemp in the affections of a young girl!"

"I have asked Mr. Kemp to come for Christmas, too," said Lady Ince.

Mrs. Grazebrook opened her mouth wide and then shut it again. It was not a pretty grimace, but it signified extreme surprise, tempered, perhaps, with annoyance.

"Then you will have murder in your back-yard," said Bertie, in his softest tone. "He and the Great Bear are sworn foes. They will fight a duel under your cedars on Christmas morning." He lit a cigarette and began to smoke tranquilly.

"Political enmity is nothing in these days. People can always meet each other," said Lady Ince.

She had purposely invited them to meet each other. She wanted to intervene and make peace between them. The way they spoke of each other shocked her inexpressibly. It was un-christian. She was far too unworldly not to perceive the hopelessness of the task she had set out to do.

"You are extraordinarily optimistic," said Bertie, regarding her with frank admiration. "And I really must congratulate you upon your courage."

"All I ask," said Gertrude Grazebrook, "is that you won't tell Evangeline that you've invited Kemp. She will contrive to stay on here if you do. She'll pretend to be ill, or ask you to instruct her, or make some other plausible excuse."

"I do not ask non-Catholics to spend Christmas here," said Lady Ince with quiet dignity. She had the feeling that the Grazebrooks were buffeting her.

"But you have asked Hubert Tressider," said Gertrude, "and he is not a Catholic. But perhaps you don't count him?" She fixed large inquiring eyes upon her hostess.

"I invited him on account of his sister." Lady Ince's voice was cold.

"The simplest way is not to tell Evangeline that Kemp is coming at all," said Mrs. Grazebrook. "Mamma would be fearfully vexed if she did not go home for Christmas, especially now Toby has promised to come."

It was an open secret that Mrs. Standen had determined to make a match between her younger daughter and Lord Wanford, who was generally known among his intimates as Toby. The affair had made quite promising progress until rather more than a year before, when Evangeline, having met Kemp at Mrs. Vandom's, had fallen in love with him. She could think of no one else and could talk of no one else. Kemp, flattered and astonished, had neither encouraged nor discouraged her. He believed that she might hereafter become useful to him. He saw in her an attractive neophyte. She belonged to the side of his life which he liked least, but of whose necessity he was convinced—the social side. He wanted to win the assistance of men and women of education and intelligence for his cause. He wanted them to help him, to work with him. Something that was a little unscrupulous in Kemp made him use Evangeline's obvious preference for himself for his own ends. He never believed that she would have consented to marry him, even if he had been in love with her. There was too much difference between the house in the Bow Road and Mrs. Standen's stately domain. Evangeline, however, thought differently. She was very much in love, and she made no effort to dissemble it. Now her visit to the neighbourhood, the unwise encouragement of Mrs. Vandom, had fanned the flame afresh. Through all her light speeches there was a very genuine anxiety in

Mrs. Grazebrook's heart. She hoped that her sister was not going to make a fool of herself.

"I think myself you are making a mistake in asking him," she continued coolly. "Hubert will be extremely displeased at being invited to meet him."

"He will certainly be polite to his fellow-guests," said Lady Ince with a touch of spirit.

"You must give me leave to doubt that," said Bertie, throwing the end of his cigarette into the fire.

"Do go and make that Vandom woman come down, Bertie," said his wife, restlessly.

"Not for the world," said Bertie, "I'm much too afraid of her."

At that moment there was a sound of laughter and voices on the stairs, and some of the people who had been under discussion appeared. Evangeline Standen resembled her sister very closely, but her colouring was more brilliant and she was less thin. Mrs. Vandom, who was with her, was small, dark, and showily dressed, with the swift appraising eyes of the Jewess. Lord Wanford, who brought up the rear, was a small fair, colourless man with a humourous expression.

"I hope you saw the Signorelli?" said Lady Ince to Mrs. Vandom.

The Vandoms were new to the neighbourhood, having moved from Manchester about a year before. They were fabulously wealthy.

"If it *is* a Signorelli," said Mrs. Vandom, who could never believe that anything was genuine.

"My husband's grandfather brought it from Italy early in the nineteenth century," said Lady Ince.

"I am sure it is very charming, whatever it is," put in Lord Wanford, "I thought I should never get Evangeline away."

Mrs. Vandom sat down near Mrs. Drane, who was now knitting almost fiercely.

"Have you seen Adam Kemp's last book of poems?" she inquired.

"I never read poetry," said Mrs. Drane, "at least, nothing since Tennyson. And I don't think I should care for anything Mr. Kemp might write."

"Oh, but I assure you a great deal of it is quite beautiful," said Mrs. Vandom, "and, of course, when he recites it himself it's more wonderful than I can tell you. He is coming to my house on the 3rd to meet just a few special friends, and he has promised to recite. If you cared about it, Mrs. Drane, I would send you a card."

Mrs. Drane shook her head and pursed up her thin lips.

"I'm very sorry—but we shall be in London then."

"Miss Standen is coming down on purpose," said Mrs. Vandom.

Gertrude's face was frankly annoyed. How could Evangeline tolerate that vulgar little Jewess for a second? But she would, alas, tolerate anyone, if only they would enable her to see Kemp.

There was a strained, rather uncomfortable, silence, broken by the sudden ringing of a bell. Lady Ince rose.

"That is the bell for Benediction," she said, in a tone that suggested relief, "are you coming, Gertrude?" She looked round at the unwilling faces of her guests.

Mrs. Grazebrook sprang up. She was too tactful not to perceive what was required of her.

"I must put on a cloak and hat," she said. "Evangeline, are you coming?"

Evangeline shook her head decisively. "I'm staying where I am, thanks." She turned to Mrs. Vandom, and began to talk to her in a low and eager undertone.

"My dear, it is perfectly true," said Sonya Vandom, "the man told me about it himself. He went there one night and he saw her. She's very pretty—not in the least like her brother. He spoke of her almost with enthusiasm."

"Oh, I've heard of her. Gertrude had her to stay in the autumn. There was a young brother, too. And Myles Dorling was taken with her. Gertrude rather thought that might come off."

She was vexed to think that Kemp had seen and admired Audrey. Hitherto he had given her no cause to be jealous; there was no rival in the field. She felt now the sting of jealousy, its fierce, degrading, humiliating pain that to the proud spirit spells torture. Kemp and Audrey? Impossible! . . . Hubert would never allow it. . .

And Audrey Tressider was a Catholic. She could meet him as an equal there. He had never allowed himself to be drawn into any spiritual or religious discussions with Evangeline. He kept her narrowly to the path indicated; his political work, and to a certain extent, his writing, were the two aspects of his life which he permitted her to know. But Audrey, from the very fact of her being a Catholic, would see that other and most intimate soul-side. Evangeline writhed at the thought.

"I believe we ought to go and call on her while we are here," she said presently. "I must ask Lady Ince if we can drive over there to-morrow."

Mrs. Drane's face was a study in disapproving stolidity. She considered it almost profane to break off a conversation as Lady Ince had done, and announce in that quiet, every-day voice that the bell had rung for Benediction. She had a strong feeling in favour of keeping religion for Sundays, or else, what was there to set that day apart from the others? Lady Ince made practically no difference between

Sundays and other days, except that she did neither needlework nor knitting on the former. But she went just as often to church on week-days. Although Mrs. Drane had been in the house a week, she had never looked inside the chapel. She would have considered it wrong to do so, a tampering with dangerous and possibly attractive things.

Feeling a little left out in the cold, since Lord Wanford stood with his back to the fire watching Evangeline with an amused expression and not uttering a word, Mrs. Drane got up and went out of the room. She disliked Mrs. Vandom, and she considered Evangeline and her sister terrible examples of bad form.

Meanwhile Mrs. Grazebrook, having put on a coat and hat, had followed her hostess into the chapel. She found her waiting for her in the passage that led to a kind of covered courtyard which led into both chapel and garden. She thrust her arm through Lady Ince's with a caressing gesture.

"I'm afraid I was rather horrid to you just now," she whispered, in a tone that was almost tender and was calculated to soothe the feelings of the most ruffled hostess. "But really and truly I'm dreadfully worried about Evangeline. She ought never to have come back to the neighbourhood. Toby will hardly forgive her a second time, and Mamma had quite made up her mind they would be engaged this Christmas."

"My dear Gertrude, her great safety lies in Kemp's indifference!"

For an unworldly and devout woman, Lady Ince had an unerring capacity for striking the right nail on the head.

"I know," said Mrs. Grazebrook. "Still, you must remember there is the money, and he might be ambitious."

"We must pray for her," said Lady Ince.

She dipped her finger into the holy-water stoup that was attached to the wall, just inside the door which she had now opened. She crossed herself, and Mrs. Grazebrook, partly from a wish to please her, imitated her action. They passed together into the church. It was dark and rather gloomy, with one red lamp burning ruby-like before the altar, which gradually evolved—as candle after candle was lit—into a blaze of light.

The priest came in. From the gallery soft strains of music fell across the silence. Lady Ince bowed her head, and the petty annoyances of the day slipped from her, becoming remote and insignificant. She even wondered how she could ever have let them disturb her. Hubert and Audrey, Evangeline and Kemp—these figures were merely shadows, whereas here was the Everlasting Truth. . . She hid her face in her hands and prayed. . .

CHAPTER XII

LINKS IN THE CHAIN

WHEN Benediction was over and the lights on the altar had been extinguished one by one, Lady Ince showed no sign of moving from her devout and recollected attitude. Mrs. Grazebrook waited a few minutes, and then, after glancing at the motionless figure kneeling by her side, rose and left the church, alone. The hall was empty as she passed through. She went straight upstairs to her sister's room.

Evangeline was alone. She was sitting near the fire, and at her elbow was a table covered with newspapers and magazines. A large box of cigarettes was also at hand. She wore a pale blue, silk wrapper, and slippers to match adorned her tiny feet, which were thrust out towards the flames.

Mrs. Grazebrook took a cigarette, lit it thoughtfully, and then sat down opposite her sister, contemplating her with a scrutiny that was almost cruel.

"Are you coming to Crayton with me to-morrow, Evangeline?" she asked.

Crayton was Mrs. Standen's abode. It was situated in Yorkshire about thirty miles from Millborough.

"I haven't made up my mind," replied her sister.

"Lady Ince doesn't want you here for Christmas. She as good as said so."

Evangeline lifted her eyebrows.

"I would not spend Christmas here for the world," she said. "Unless, of course, anyone I particularly wished to meet was expected. I hear Hubert Tressider is coming, so there is no chance of *that* happening."

But she was obviously uneasy on the point, and looked at Mrs. Grazebrook as if she expected her to confirm this assertion.

"I strongly advise you to behave sensibly during the next few weeks," said Mrs. Grazebrook. "As it is, your extraordinary conduct—your rushing off like this with Sonya Vandom into Millborough every day to catch sight of Kemp—is simply alienating Toby. He is very forgiving, but you will wear out his patience at last. And what is the good of it all? You cannot marry Kemp!"

A deep flush stained Evangeline's face. The shaft had hit home. She waited a second, and then said coolly:

"I have changed my mind about Toby. I don't mean to marry him."

"People will say that *he* has changed his mind and does not intend to marry *you*," said Mrs. Grazebrook bitterly.

"Is that all?" inquired Evangeline, with affected weariness.

Mrs. Grazebrook rose with a movement of impatience. She flung the half-consumed cigarette into the fire.

"Not nearly," she said, "but I must go and dress for dinner, so I can't tell you now, just what Bertie and I think of it all."

"Bertie!" repeated Evangeline, scornfully.

"Yes, Bertie. You see there are even points about which he and I agree."

"I suppose that pussy-cat, Lady Ince, has put you up to saying all this?"

"You know perfectly well that she is not a pussy-cat," said Mrs. Grazebrook, coolly, "and your conduct is of the kind that rather shrieks for unfavourable comment! You really can be so frightfully ill-bred, Evangeline."

She went out of the room. In the passage she met Lady Ince, her head still covered with a black veil.

"I've just been talking to Evangeline. It wasn't a success," she said, "and I do believe she suspects that Kemp is coming here for Christmas. No doubt, she will make some excuse for going into Millborough to-morrow, in order to find out."

"He isn't there—he has had to go to London this week," said Lady Ince. "He wrote and told me that his sister has been ill."

"I believe she really does mean to marry him, "continued Mrs. Grazebrook, fretfully. "Imagine the disgrace! We could'nt possibly have a man like that in the family. But he has been steadily imbuing Evangeline with all his democratic ideas, and she is so weak—she has swallowed them all."

"She would not be at all a good wife for him," said Lady Ince, regarding the possibility from a totally different standpoint. "She isn't a Catholic, so she couldn't help him at all. What Adam Kemp wants in his life is the influence of a good woman—a pious woman. Someone who would steady him. There is so very much that is good in him, you know." She spoke almost pleadingly.

"Is there? I am glad to say I have had very little opportunity of studying his hidden charms," said Mrs. Grazebrook; "I can only see the deplorable and lamentable effect and influence he has had upon my sister. I wish, indeed, that Hubert and he would fight a duel, as Bertie suggested just now. Hubert would be certain to disable him!"

"My dear Gertrude!"

"Yes, I know I am horrid. But you don't seem to see how dreadful it would be for all of us."

"I do, indeed. But I think, too, how disastrous such a marriage would be for Adam."

Gertrude gave a little wriggle of impatience.

"Then do, please—for his sake if you won't do it for hers—contrive to keep him out of her way until we are safely off to Crayton! I really think it will kill Mamma if Evangeline and Toby don't get engaged this Christmas. She has *so* set her heart on it."

'But if she does'nt love him—" began Lady Ince.

"*I* married Bertie," said Mrs. Grazebrook in a pointed tone. "We hit it off admirably. You might almost think we cared about each other,—passionately, I mean, like people who have married for love."

"It is a dangerous experiment to make. And in your case there was no Kemp!"

Lady Ince passed on down the long gallery till she came to her own room. It was bare and plain, almost poorly furnished, like a nun's cell. A small iron bedstead stood in one corner, the walls were white-washed, the furniture was of polished deal. The floor was stained, and only one narrow strip of carpet served as a covering. There was no fire, and on that December night it was bitterly cold. She never admitted guests to her room, except very intimate Catholic friends, when she was ill, so that few people knew of the austerities she habitually practiced.

Lady Ince was so unworldly, and led such a secluded life, that she even suffered from the effort she made from time to time to entertain parties of people at Abbot's End. And this party had been no exception to the rule. No one had seemed quite happy or satisfied. Lord Wanford, a cousin of her late husband's, had begged that Evangeline might be invited, and the girl had hardly troubled to speak to him. She had been fetched early in the morning by Mrs. Vandom and had seldom returned until it was

time to dress for dinner. What they had done or where they had been during the interim had never been divulged, but Lord Wanford, ordinarily the most patient and imperturbable of men, had shown unmistakable signs of restless misery. There was a whisper that Mrs. Vandom had arranged a meeting with Kemp, and that the unfortunate affair had been divulged, but Lord Wanford, ordinarily the control her sister, and Mrs. Drane and sundry other ladies of the party had not attempted to disguise their disapproval.

Mrs. Drane was particularly informing on the subject of Kemp, when neither her hostess nor Miss Standen were present. She knew all about him—he was quite a thorn in poor Mr. Tressider's side. And it was extraordinary that Lady Ince should invite him to the house, but she was so absurd, she declared that she did not intend to shut her doors upon any of her fellow-Catholics. A great deal of harm was done by an injudicious principle such as that, Mrs. Drane observed to her interlocutors. Lady Ince ought to have considered the feelings of her two oldest friends, Mrs. Standen and Mr. Tressider. She ought never to have had the man inside her house. And he was coming again, coming for Christmas, to that very exclusive Christmas party of hers. Mrs. Drane shook her head. She fully expected that Mr. Tressider would go away directly he discovered Kemp's presence. The two men were not on speaking terms. . . .

She was holding forth in this strain before dinner. The conversation was, however, interrupted by Lord Wanford's entrance. He did not like Mrs. Drane, and it hurt him to feel that probably at this moment she had been engaged in tearing Evangeline's reputation to ribbons.

And the girl deserved all that could be said of her. Toby, realizing this, endured agonies. It was not Kemp who pursued her, it was, alas, she who pursued Kemp in a very undignified manner. He could not find fault with Kemp under the circumstances; his conduct towards her had never at any time been encouraging. Latterly, the affair had seemed to be dying down, and in a period of renewed hope Lord Wanford had requested Lady Ince to invite Evangeline to Abbot's End. Now, thanks to Mrs. Vandom, his little scheme had utterly failed.

Yet he came into the drawing-room that evening looking calm and placid.

"Such a man," Mrs. Standen had been heard to say, "would make an admirable husband for dear Evangeline who has been known to storm for an hour when a dress didn't fit, and has even torn one to pieces!"

Amongst other things, he had certainly endured Evangeline's rejection of his hand and name, with an implacable serenity of mien. She had, it is true, done everything to encourage him. They had been seen together on every possible occasion throughout two London seasons. Their names had been freely coupled together, and Mrs. Standen had whispered her hopes to at least six intimate friends, who secretly deplored Toby's lack of taste. And in the end, Evangeline had astonished everyone by refusing him. No one was more astonished than Lord Wanford himself. But he had hesitated a week too long. In that week, the gaunt, ungainly figure of Adam Kemp had risen above the social horizon, and at an immense musical party given by the Vandoms in their house in Berkeley Square, Adam had recited some of his own poems. Lord Wanford had yawned throughout the performance, and he had fully expected that Evangeline would yawn with him. To

his surprise she had snubbed him when he suggested that they should take a little well-earned rest from the music, in some far corner of the smoking-room.

It was Kemp's first appearance in London, as a poet. Hitherto, he had been known only to a very small group of advanced socialists, whose political opinions he shared. But Mrs. Vandom's *flair* had not been at fault. That night the Kemp legend was let loose. He was a gutter-boy. Vandom had found him starving in the street and had sent him to school. He had worked his way up—had gone to Oxford. There were relations hidden away somewhere, quite unpresentable, of course. As to his poems, there were no two opinions. They were "it," as Mrs. Vandom illuminatingly remarked. Kemp had been the great success of her party; his name was on every lip; she herself acquired new radiance from that sudden glory. She corrected the legend here and there. It wasn't Mr. Vandom who had found him starving in the East End. Some rich man, now dead, had discovered the boy, fed him, clothed him, educated him. And, of course, he was a wonderful genius. Yes, she believed he had slept under railway-arches in his youth, like Francis Thompson and Lafcadio Hearn. Like them, too, she would add, he was a Catholic. Not a very good or devout one, but still enough to give him quite an added touch of romance, of distinction. . . .

Yet even *she* had been astonished to find Evangeline near her, on that now historic evening, with a white face and compressed lips.

"I must know him, Sonya," she said, "I really must."

Mrs. Vandom owed something to the kindly offices of Mrs. Standen. She had, so to speak, been launched in London under her ample wing not half a decade before. And she did not want to risk her

sponsor's good opinion. She regarded Evangeline doubtfully.

"You know he's quite a man of the people," she said, hesitatingly.

"I don't care who or what he is. I want to know him."

A week later, when Lord Wanford invited her to be his wife, he was met by a firm unequivocal refusal. But it was not until quite a long time afterwards that he attributed this sudden change of front to the influence of Adam Kemp. That man with rather long, dark hair who had recited his own rough, queer poems? A curious-looking fellow, but not one whom he could ever have remotely regarded as a rival. Then he heard gossip at his club. A new version of *She Stoops to Conquer*, with Evangeline Standen in the principal part! He writhed at the idea. . .

Evangeline sat next him at dinner that night at Abbot's End. She was silent and obviously preoccupied. It was a pity, but Sonya had just told her she couldn't take her out to-morrow, the motor had to be sent into Millborough to fetch Binny, who was coming home from school. Binny—she knew Sonya's boy, a horrid little reptile of Jewish aspect, and a shock of black curls that needed the scissors. The strange thing was, that Sonya adored him, thought him perfect. She was known to spoil him, wouldn't ever let him be punished. And because Binny was coming home she couldn't take her, Evangeline, out in the motor to-morrow. It was tiresome, just as she wished so much to go over and see Audrey Tressider.

Wanford, seeing that she was unflatteringly preoccupied, bestowed his attention upon his other neighbour, who happened to be Mrs. Drane. He did not care for her, but she was always full of local information, and to-night her conversation dealt

almost exclusively with the impending strike at Millborough. Did he know that that man Kemp was attacking poor Hubert Tressider again? There had been an accident—a bad one—in his Works, and Kemp had succeeded in fastening the whole of the blame upon him. It was'nt a bit true, really. Kemp had a clever way of manipulating facts to his own ends.

"One does so dislike the man," she continued, feeling that she had contrived to hit upon a subject that interested her hearer, "it is such a pity people should know him. Really nice people, too, such as our hostess."

"Lady Ince regards him as a brand to be snatched from the burning," replied Lord Wanford, "if he were not a Catholic and a baddish one she would never invite him here."

"It seems so disloyal—when she's such a very old friend of the Tressiders. And then to ask them all here for Christmas!"

"All here for Christmas?" he repeated, "surely, you must be making a mistake? Tressider won't meet the man, you know."

"She told us so herself to-night. Of course, it's a most appalling *gaffe*."

Even Wanford was astonished. Tressider was capable of leaving the house when he discovered who his fellow-guest was to be. Things at Millborough were approaching a crisis; there was bound to be a strike in a few days. And it was all Kemp's doing. Kemp had worked for it.

"If you have any influence with dear Lady Ince you might persuade her not to have him here."

"I never interfere," he said; "she knows, as well as I do, that the two men are bitter enemies."

He glanced at Lady Ince, at her fair, sweet, nun-like face with its crown of fading blond hair. It was

impossible to attribute malice to her, and he was obliged to believe that her motive, whatever it was, had been a good one. She was unworldly, and she could never have had an enemy in her life. But he felt perturbed by this information, and still wondered if it could be true.

Evangeline spoke to him suddenly.

"Toby, will you motor me over to Millborough to-morrow, to call on the Tressiders? You know, Hubert has his little sister living with him."

"No, I will not, my dear Evangeline," he said dryly, "I do not think the air of Millborough is good for you."

Although he spoke lightly there was irony in his voice. She flushed hotly.

"Why do you say that?"

"People there are suffering from nerves. There's a strike impending."

"I don't want to go into the town. I only want to go to the Hall."

"Much too near," he replied. "Why don't you get Mrs. Vandom to take you?"

"She's going to meet her very objectionable offspring, Binny, to-morrow. One can never count on Sonya when she's got her boy there. And it's my only chance—we're going home the day after to-morrow."

"I am very sorry for your disappointment," he observed.

"You used always to do what I wanted, Toby."

There was reproach in her voice.

"I hear Miss Tressider is charming," he said, ignoring her remark, "charming and very pretty. Her aunt, Mrs. Corby, was dreadfully sorry when she elected to come and live at Millborough."

"Gertrude knows her," said Miss Standen, "I missed her in Surrey. And I have a certain curiosity to see her."

"You will have a great many opportunities, when there is less ferment in Millborough than there is now."

"I wonder how she gets on with Hubert," said Evangeline, crumbling her bread.

She was afraid of this new influence in Kemp's life. It was one that might materially change him. Beneath his hard exterior he had the poetic temperament; he was a romantic, imaginative man. If he fell in love with this girl he was capable of throwing up the sponge for her sake, capable, too, of leaving Millborough with his work undone. And the girl . . what did she think of him? Evangeline would have given a great deal to learn Audrey Tressider's opinion of Adam Kemp.

Lately she had seen little of him. He had refused Sonya Vandom's two last invitations, although he was perfectly aware that she, Evangeline, was in the neighbourhood, and would therefore, in all probability, be there. Of course, he was busy; he had his hands full; there had been talk of his sister's illness, necessitating a journey to London. His movements were pretty well known, for he was a leading figure in Millborough. Their recent meetings, from her point of view, had been brief and unsatisfactory.

Hitherto, she had never had any reason to be jealous. She had always been able to flatter herself that she was the one woman in his life. She had accorded to him in the beginning a certain, patronizing friendship. He did not belong to her world, and she made him feel it. But she had not foreseen that she was going to fall in love with him, that she would even abase herself a little, to attract his attention.

Of late, his indifference when they did meet had wounded her. She had believed him to be too fully occupied with his work to spare much time for other things. But now the advent of Miss Tressider in

Millborough had filled her with jealous suspicions. He was certain, with that bold unscrupulousness of his, to make an effort at least to win his enemy's sister over to his side. He would shrink from the use of no weapon that was likely to hurt or to injure Hubert.

And this girl, what would she think of him? Would she, too, succumb to that deadly fascination of his? Evangeline asked herself these questions with a sinking heart. Her part was finished. Kemp had no further use for her. He disdained such help as she could give. Her mother and Gertrude were eagerly expecting her to marry Lord Wanford. They wanted her to live her life on safe, conventional lines. She could see herself, living at Warehurst with Toby, wearying of its rather old-fashioned magnificence. Going to London with Toby two or three times a year, dining out, going to plays, to Hurlingham,—a gay, charming life that would have satisfied so many women. Travelling abroad with Toby,—Paris, Rome, Egypt, and the rest of it,—staying at smart hotels, meeting the same people. . . She gave a little sigh. Wanford, looking at her sharply, then as if to ascertain the reason for that sigh, saw her troubled face undisguisedly miserable and hopeless, like that of an unhappy child.

CHAPTER XIII

ABBOT'S END

IT was with some relief, that Lady Ince witnessed the departure of her guests a few days before Christmas. She still felt a certain misgiving with regard to her next batch. Everyone—even Lord Wanford, who was generally so tolerant, devoted, and sympathetic,—had frankly told her that they were afraid she had made a mistake in asking the Tressiders to meet Kemp.

"It's only for two nights. I expect Hubert and Audrey will prefer to return home directly after Christmas," she said.

"If, indeed, they do not go sooner," Lord Wanford had observed, dryly.

Evangeline departed with obvious reluctance, and yet submissively, for there was really no other alternative open to her. The desired visit to Millborough Hall had not been paid, and she had a strong suspicion that Gertrude had a secret and particular motive for thus hurrying her away. Something to do with Kemp, of course! But even *she* never imagined that Lady Ince would do anything so rash and foolish as to invite him to Abbot's End at the same time as the Tressiders.

Soon after they had gone, a letter came from Hubert. Under any other circumstances its contents would have disappointed Lady Ince, for she had a strong liking for Hubert, chiefly based on the fact that she had really cared for his unsympathetic mother. He wrote now to say that he could not leave Millborough, so that Audrey must come alone. He should, however, send the motor for her on the afternoon of Christmas day, so that they could at

least spend part of the day together. Audrey had, indeed, offered to remain with him altogether, but he did not like the idea of her attending Midnight Mass in Millborough, seeing that the town was in such a disturbed state, so he was glad to think Lady Ince could receive her. "She is very *dévote*, just like my poor father," he wrote at the end. "Of course, I highly disapprove of her going down to Millborough to Mass on these cold and dark, winter mornings. But so far I have not put my foot down."

"I shall tell him when I see him that he must never put his foot down," Lady Ince said to herself, as she put away the letter. "It is so necessary for a girl just at that impressionable age to practice her religion regularly and devoutly. She mustn't be allowed to give up the ways she learned at her convent school." A word or two to Audrey herself on the subject, might not be amiss.

Kemp was the first to arrive, about tea-time on Christmas Eve. He looked restless, weary, and nervous. He was singularly silent, and his expression was slightly ambiguous; it suggested a wish to be there, coupled with the feeling that he had been enticed into a comfortable trap that would imprison, without hurting him.

Lady Ince gave him a cup of tea. She herself ate nothing, though she drank a cup of tea without milk or sugar. She was fasting, and hoped that Kemp would not notice it.

"We shall be almost alone. The Delaneys couldn't come. Nor could Hubert Tressider. I am expecting his sister—she ought to be here soon. Hubert tells me she is a devout Catholic."

Kemp looked slightly startled, almost incredulous.

"Miss Tressider!" he said.

"Yes. Such a sweet girl. I've felt sorry for her, transplanted to Millborough. You've never seen her, I suppose?"

"I have seen her—three times," said Kemp, stirring his tea abstractedly. "It's a great mistake, her coming to live down here. You ought to persuade her to go away." He spoke with a sudden, almost violent energy. "To go away—before she gets hurt!"

"Why should she be hurt?" inquired Lady Ince, patiently.

Her mild, unseeing attitude always astonished Kemp, even while it slightly irritated him. Still, he had cause to be grateful for it to-night.

"Because things are moving here very rapidly," he said. "We shall simply *force* Tressider's hand. And if she has a heart at all, this last hideous tragedy of Daniel Scott's death must have wounded her, and made her ask herself whether her darling brother is quite so impeccable as she imagines!"

"I hope Hubert will do all he can to keep that disagreeable side of his life from her," said Lady Ince.

She was curiously old-fashioned, and believed that politics, industrial disputes, the burning social questions of the day, were not for women, especially young women. A man's quarrels with his workers were best left behind in the factory. The discussion of them could only smear and soil his home life. And she respected Hubert as a strong, upright, determined, conscientious man. He possessed characteristics that she admired. She felt certain that he would watch over Audrey, guard her, perhaps gently mould her. Her ancient friendship for Hubert and his mother made her take a warm interest in Audrey.

"That will hardly be possible." Kemp's voice was brutal. "And it *ought* not to be possible," he added fiercely.

Already, though he did not venture to tell Lady Ince so, Audrey was aware of it. He himself had

not permitted her to remain in ignorance. He had had the good fortune to approach her on the very threshold of her new life. And she was impressionable, sensitive, highly gifted. His words had sunk in. He had wished to hurt her, yet seeing her hurt, he had suffered. . .

"I do hope you will hide your enmity towards Mr. Tressider while his sister is here. It is only for a short time—she is leaving again to-morrow afternoon," said Lady Ince, with a hint of gentle rebuke in her tone. "I am sure it would grieve Audrey—if she knew. And at Christmas time, too—" She paused, looking at him.

"If Tressider had come himself I should not have stayed," he declared. "But, as it is, I will do as you wish—I will hide my enmity." He smiled, but it did not render the expression of his face any more pleasant.

He was weakened at the prospect of seeing Audrey so soon, so unexpectedly. He felt a sensation of joy that made him ashamed. For he was glad, so glad, that he felt physically soothed and comforted. No, he wouldn't spoil her Christmas. She shouldn't be sorry to find him there. She should hear no word of Hubert from him, no word, bad or good. His face softened, there was a milder look in his eyes. He wanted, insensately, to thank Lady Ince for her Christmas gift of Audrey's presence.

"Thank you." Lady Ince's voice held relief. People, she considered, ought always to be able to meet each other without quarrelling or aversion. It only required a little tact and self-control. She would have had no fear even if these two bitter antagonists had actually met under her roof. People, in her opinion, were seldom so bad as they were made out to be. She had often discovered qualities in the reputedly disagreeable, that had rendered

them in her eyes almost lovable. And Kemp had yielded quickly, almost eagerly, to her request for the little truce. He needed a good influence in his life—the quiet, steadying influence of a good, Catholic woman. . .

They heard the door bell ring, and then a slight stir in the hall. Audrey was announced, and came into the room wearing her heavy furs, her face still bright and glowing from the keen, wintry air. Kemp, standing by the fire, watched her as she approached her hostess with a warm eagerness of manner. He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, the small face drawn with the definite outline of a cameo, without, however, its hardness; the dark hair, the smiling, joyous eyes.

He did not think she had perceived his presence until Lady Ince said in her quiet voice:

"I think you and Mr. Kemp have met each other."

They shook hands. Kemp was silent; there was a hint of gaucheness in his manner. Audrey's face was cold and controlled. She had not expected to find him there, and the sight of him disturbed her a little. What would Hubert say if he knew?

His presence seemed to her inexplicable. Although Abbot's End was a dozen miles from Millborough, the latter was its postal town and also possessed its nearest railway-station of any importance. The place, so to speak, was in actual touch with Millborough, even to the foul odours that blew across from its manufactories when the wind was in the east. It was, therefore, little likely that Lady Ince could even in her seclusion remain utterly uninformed of the happenings of Millborough. She must be perfectly aware of the enmity that existed between these two men whom she had invited to meet each other. It was a matter for eternal congratulation

that Hubert had at the last moment been unable to come.

"We shall have a very quiet Christmas. Three of my guests have failed, Hubert and the Delaneys," said Lady Ince to Audrey, as she gave her some tea.

"And you know, Hubert insists upon sending for me to-morrow," said Audrey.

"Yes, I wish he could have spared you longer. You must be cold, my dear. It isn't snowing, is it?"

"No. And I'm not really cold, thank you. The motor was closed."

Audrey hardly knew what she was saying. This sudden vision of Kemp had destroyed something of her self-possession. She could not be glad to find him there,—that would be disloyal to Hubert. Yet against her better judgment she felt something of pleasure. She felt, too, that he was not quite indifferent to her presence. His eyes turned towards her from time to time with a fierce, eager look.

"Father Blake has arrived. He will hear confessions at nine o'clock. I'm afraid we shan't be a large congregation this year,—people won't come so far when the weather's bad. After all this rain, the lanes are in a terrible condition." Lady Ince's tranquil voice seemed to adjust conflicting elements and bring them once more into harmony. She was so unconscious of difficulty in any situation that she almost contrived to make others forget it. She conveyed an atmosphere of perfect serenity.

Kemp had shown himself malleable. And Audrey had surely not been sufficiently long in Millborough to know much of the deep enmity that so unfortunately existed between her brother and this man. Political enmity . . less hurtful to the soul, perhaps, than a violent personal enmity. Lady Ince would have given worlds to make peace between them. . .

Kemp held out his long, slender, spatulate hands to the blaze. He could hardly expect Audrey to display much pleasure at meeting him, and yet, he was aggrieved at the coldness of her voice and manner. He fought against a growing desire to win her friendship.

Lady Ince's speech had disturbed him on other grounds. She seemed to take for granted that her guests would wish to go to confession. She had spoken of Father Blake's presence, giving them details which, of course, they would wish to know. Confession? It was long since Kemp had approached that Tribunal of Penance. He was not at all sure that he intended to approach it to-night. He had come to Abbot's End fearing some pressure of the kind would be put upon him, and he had not arrived at any definite conclusion on the point. It is true that of late he had become aware of a certain nostalgia for those neglected, spiritual things which once had formed so great a part of his life. He had been careless, but he had never lost his Faith. It was there, waiting for him when he chose to return to the practice of it. Sometimes, he had found himself looking back with passionate longing upon a past that once had been rich in intimate spiritual experiences and consolations. It seemed to beckon to him. Yet he found no way of reconciling it with his present activities. It would not come into line. Some day, perhaps, when his work was finished and when the defeat of Hubert was accomplished. . . The defeat of Hubert. . . As this thought came into his mind he looked suddenly at the girl sitting there, so unconscious of his sinister resolve. And as he looked, the plan seemed to lose a little of its savour. But to begin his work all over again from a different stand-point, that was another thing, and he was not prepared for it. He set his face. He was aware

of a certain wistfulness on the part of Lady Ince, and he did not misunderstand it. In her ardour for souls she was enthusiastic, almost fanatical. It was to this ardour that he owed his presence at Abbot's End to-night. It affected him; in his present, unsettled, irresolute mood it affected him more than he cared to acknowledge. Her prayers for him—if she ever did pray for him—must resemble, he felt, the prayers of his sister Rachel. And Audrey . . . would she teach Audrey Tressider to pray for him, too?

"I have had the Grazebrooks and Miss Standen here for a few days," he heard Lady Ince say. "They left, the day before yesterday. Evangeline was sorry she could not manage to go over and see you."

She was speaking to Audrey.

"I have never met her," said Audrey, "but I have stayed with the Grazebrooks,—Ninian and I were there in the autumn."

"Oh, and didn't you meet Sir Myles Dorling there?"

Audrey's face was very faintly flushed.

"Yes, he was there. You know that Ninian has gone to Africa with him?"

"Yes. Hubert told me."

Audrey felt Kemp's eyes upon her.

"Myles is an old friend of mine," continued Lady Ince.

"Yes?" said Audrey.

Mentally she contrasted the two men, both of whom had changed life a little for her. They had each tried in quite different ways, to impose their will upon hers. She felt that life could never be quite the same thing to her as it was before she met them. But while Myles had been suave, kind, tenderly urgent, and caring for her a great deal, Kemp

was only violent, strenuous in his determination to make her adopt his point of view for some secret end of his own. It was not because he cared for her, that he tried so passionately to influence her. The difference between the two men was enormous. Difference of class, of race, of education, environment and outlook. Yet she had never felt in Myles Dorling's cultivated presence this disquieting sensation of being not only swayed and profoundly influenced, but also, in a sense, of being attracted wholly against her will, her better judgment.

In Kemp's presence she struggled for liberty. Fantastically, she felt that these strong and thin hands of his were engaged in weaving webs to imprison her, while her own fingers were ceaselessly occupied in a futile effort to tear them asunder. She must never stop tearing at them,—never for a moment,—or she would find herself held fast.

"Won't you come up to your room, my dear?" said Lady Ince. "We shall dine early to-night—at half past seven. And, of course, we shall not dress for dinner." She rose, and Audrey followed her slowly from the room.

Kemp held the door open for them, and as Audrey passed into the hall, her head thrown back with an instinctive, unconscious gesture of pride, she felt that his eyes watched her, critically, closely, not unsympathetically.

"You mustn't mind his being here," said Lady Ince, as she accompanied Audrey to her room, and closed the door as if she wished to say a few confidential words to her on the subject. "And I want you, now that he is here, to be nice to him. I wanted him to come very particularly. He is a careless Catholic, and I felt it would be giving him an opportunity."

"I don't mind his being here at all," said Audrey.

"My fear is that Hubert will mind very much when he hears that we were here at the same time." She stood in front of the fire, looking down into its dancing, rosy flames.

"Surely, not . . . at Christmas time . ." said Lady Ince, looking pained.

"Christmas could never alter Hubert's opinion of Mr. Kemp," said Audrey.

Lady Ince loved Christmas more than all the other Feasts of the Church. She always helped to prepare the "crib" with her own hands. She had herself painted the scenery for the background, from the sketches she had made when on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. And she could not bring herself to believe that any one—Catholic or Protestant—could be quite indifferent to the peace of Christmas—the peace that flowed down through the ages like a warm flood of charity, from the coming of the Divine Child. No heart could surely be so hard as not to feel something of that softening touch. . .

Audrey took off her hat, and smoothed back her hair.

"Hubert is very stern," she said; "and he doesn't like me to meet or to know Mr. Kemp."

"And yet . . you might help him. Being a Catholic yourself—" Lady Ince spoke musingly. "He needs help, you know."

"Hubert would'nt think of that."

"And, of course, you are bound to do as he thinks best. I—I should'nt like you to vex him."

"No, he's rather a terrifying person when he's angry." Audrey spoke lightly, but her face was serious. "If he thought I were helping Mr. Kemp as you suggest, he would send me away."

"And you wish to stay?"

"Yes, I think so. If everything doesn't prove too difficult in Millborough."

Her ten days' sojourn under Hubert's roof had given her a fairly clear insight into her brother's character. It was not altogether reassuring. She missed in him the warm lovableness of Ninian's gay, careless nature. He was a cold, controlled, iron-willed man, unflinching, unbendable. She found herself continually bending to his will in little things. The process of adjustment was not easy. Sometimes it was definitely painful. She knew now, just the kind of difficulties she would be called upon to encounter. But to-night, she felt a wonderful, new liberty. She was going to be "nice" to Kemp, as Lady Ince expressed it, regardless of Hubert. It was not her fault that he was there. Lady Ince was responsible for deliberately bringing them together. And she was glad, and not sorry, that he had come. . .

"I do so hope that Mr. Kemp will go to confession," continued Lady Ince, in a slightly wistful tone. "Father Blake is so clever at dealing with . . with people who have been a little careless. It's so very fortunate that he was able to come. He is such a wise, understanding priest."

Audrey felt grateful to her for this profound interest in Kemp's soul. She was aware that if a spiritual change were to be wrought in the man at this most critical moment, it might be the saving of Hubert. For a change of that kind would necessarily restrain Kemp from continuing this wild and unchecked career of calumny in Millborough. The campaign against Hubert, which she felt to be cruel and malicious, must surely cease. She wanted ardently, then, to proffer such assistance as she could. For how could Hubert be angry with her if she were actuated by the sole intention of helping him? And then, suddenly, she seemed to see quite clearly the

hopelessness of the attempt. Kemp was not the kind of man to be easily influenced. She said bitterly:

"Mr. Kemp is very cruel and very strong."

Lady Ince stared in astonishment.

"So you have found that out already?"

"I've found out a good deal in the last ten days."

"Mrs. Grazebrook prevented Evangeline from going over to see you. She was so afraid that she intended to go to Millborough to try and meet Mr. Kemp. She has been very foolish about him. It is hardly possible, but one might almost think she was in love with him. He fascinates her. She admires his poetry. She seems to forget that he is quite a man of the people. And then she is'nt the right woman to help him. Very clever and charming and delightfully pretty, only, of course, not a Catholic. He wants a good Catholic influence in his life." Lady Ince thus summarized the situation.

"But you—surely, he likes you! Couldn't you be that good influence?" There was a mixture of courage and timidity and real earnestness in Audrey's manner then that touched Lady Ince.

She shook her head. "I am too old to influence these revolutionary young men. Sometimes I feel utterly out of touch with the world as it is now. I have lived too secluded a life."

She moved slowly towards the door.

CHAPTER XIV

FACE TO FACE

WHEN Audrey was left alone she took off her heavy winter coat, and lay on a couch that was drawn up near the fire. She felt both tired and strangely excited. It was the presence of Kemp that had excited her. For days past she had not seen him, she had heard no word of him, and she had guessed that there was a deliberate intention in Hubert's complete silence concerning him. Now, she suddenly found herself under the same roof with Kemp. Her thoughts circled round him. Had he known before he came that he would find her there? He had expressed no surprise at seeing her. No doubt, Lady Ince had at least warned him that she would presently come in. But she—she had been flung, in all her unsuspecting ignorance, into his presence. She had not known, at first, whether she were glad or sorry to see him there, the tall ungainly figure, the splendid head, the burning eyes from whose gaze she had longed to shield her face. . . If it had not been for Hubert, if there had existed no enmity and hatred between the two men, she felt that her gladness at seeing Kemp would have been a singularly unalloyed sentiment. But always she seemed to see him through that cloud of fierce antagonism. In loyalty to Hubert she must not permit herself to be glad. . .

Presently she rose, and mindful of Lady Ince's speech, she did not change the dark, cloth skirt she was wearing. But she put on a white blouse of some soft, silk material. Its ivory tint suited her. Her throat was bare; her dark hair was gathered simply

at her neck. When it was nearly half past seven she went downstairs, and entered the drawing-room.

Kemp was already there. He was sitting alone, with some books heaped on a table beside him. But he was not reading. His body was bent, his chin rested on his hand; there was melancholy in his attitude and something, too, of exhaustion. The opening and closing of the door had aroused him and he lifted his face a little, gazing at her bewilderedly.

He had wondered if he would have any opportunity of talking to her alone. He had come down early on purpose, and when she did not appear he had experienced a sense of injury. He thought of those three occasions when he had seen her. That night at Millborough station, when he had seen Hubert Tressider, his enemy, stoop and kiss her cheek. Then later the same evening, at Millborough Hall when she had greeted him, a troubling vision in her white dress, in the bleak chilly drawing-room. Then, on the steps of the Catholic church, on the following morning. A grey, wet, winter morning with the wind blowing in bitter gusts through those mean little streets. . . Yet, that was the time he had always preferred to remember. He had been nearer to her then; he had felt, as never before, the great democracy of the Catholic Church where all men are equal, where wealth shall set no man above his fellows, where birth and intellect count for nothing, unless it be to confer a greater responsibility upon the possessors of them, deepening the difficulty of the spiritual tasks. . . Yes, there, at least, they were—or could be, equal. . . Equal, too, in their nothingness before Almighty God.

Audrey advanced slowly, almost as if she were reluctant to disturb him. But he had risen to his feet, had pushed a chair nearer to the fire for her.

"I did not know that you were coming, until after

I arrived here this evening," he said, and his voice, at once harsh and musical, seemed to fall upon her ears with an extraordinary power. "Had I known, I should have tried to ascertain whether you had any objection to my presence. For you have—have you not?—every right to object!"

"I have no right to object to the presence of any friend of Lady Ince's whom she chooses to ask." She spoke with a touch of pride. Almost, the words conveyed the impression that she was wholly indifferent as to whether he were there or not. Her face was cold, composed, smiling.

"Thank you," he said, only half reassured. He had not seen her for nearly a week, and his visit to the Bow Road lay between them and their last meeting. It was a visit that had flung him back sharply upon his old environment, upon the principal things that had gone to the making of him. Hard and austere as they were, he recognized their value. Only, between him and this woman, they seemed to set an eternal, dividing gulf.

"It is very fortunate for us all, however, that your brother was not able to come!" He said the words with brutal frankness.

"Yes, I think it is." Audrey's voice was carefully controlled. "But you see he is not a Catholic—there is no real reason why he should come. And he didn't mind my coming without him—he was only against my going to Midnight Mass at Millborough."

"And you," he said, scrutinizing her keenly," you always do what he approves?"

"I try to," said Audrey.

That strange, inward excitement she had felt earlier in the evening, was growing upon her. The man's very presence affected her, rousing her, as it were, to a more vigourous and conscious life, fling-

ing violent hands upon her quiet composure, as if with the determination to destroy it.

And again she had that curious sensation of struggling for her liberty.

She did not like him; there were moments when she felt afraid of him. When freed from his actual presence she went near to hating him for his insufferable conduct towards Hubert. But when he was there, she felt his strange power to the full; it seemed to entrap her, to compel her to listen and to sympathize. She was attracted, fascinated against her will. She even understood a little, why a rich, headstrong girl like Evangeline Standen should have fallen in love with him, and scandalized her friends and relations by a too active pursuit of this man, who had obviously grown weary of the adventure. He possessed personality, the poet's temperament. The "gutter-genius,"—yes, they had called him that in scorn. But whether of the gutter or not he was, in truth, a genius, aflame with that creative energy which lends warmth and color and force to character, and sets a man above his fellow-men.

"May I ask if you mean to stay long in Millborough?"

"As long as Hubert cares to have me."

"And you think you will be able to bear it, for months—perhaps years?"

"Bear what?" And now her voice trembled a little.

"The slavery, the starvation, the tragedy of Millborough!"

"I shall try to." Her wide, fearless eyes met his with undiminished confidence.

He thought to himself: "She shall know—she shall! Even if it hurts her!"

He felt like a surgeon about to perform a neces-

sary, painful operation on a conscious patient. Only, he must not look at her eyes, at her suffering eyes.

"I advise you, then, never to go down to your brother's Works. It would be for you like going down into hell!"

Her face was blanched; he saw that she made a movement with her hands as if to steady herself.

"You would see then how men die slowly for fifteen shillings a week! Die, perhaps, in agony, like Daniel Scott last week!"

"Oh!" The sound was between sigh and sob; it came to him like an appeal for mercy. It tore at Kemp's nerves.

"You would hardly wonder, then, at my crusade in Millborough."

She was silent. Suddenly she thought: He is defending himself to me. . . Why to me? . . It was as if he were longing achingly, not so much to win her approval, as to justify himself in her eyes.

"But I do wonder," she said at last, and her voice was quite steady. "I know very little yet, but it must be fearful to have such a hatred in your soul as you have for my brother. You've come here tonight for Midnight Mass, and you won't put it aside for even a few hours. Do you think any work of yours can be blessed, founded on such a fierce hatred?"

She was not pale any more. All that cool composure of hers was gone. Her cheeks flamed; her eyes shone. She looked beautiful now, and changed; alive and almost passionate in her condemnation.

He said sulkily:

"You are attacking a side-issue, Miss Tressider, are you not?"

"Religion is never a side-issue with us Catholics," she proclaimed. "It's the first—the principal thing. The one that guides all the rest."

"That is an excellent doctrine for pious women. But we men have our work to do in the world."

"Don't you see how much better—how far more faithfully you'd do it—if you made it a sacred thing, dedicated to God?"

Adam Kemp stared at her in silence. Then he gave a short, grim laugh.

"Almost thou persuadest me—" he quoted. But he was astonished at her vehemence and, perhaps, a little touched by it. She seemed to have flung aside so completely all personal issues, was thinking less of her brother, perhaps, than of the injury Kemp was doing to his own soul by cherishing such a fierce and malignant hatred. The very indulgence of such a sentiment rendered his whole work evil in her eyes. She said just what Rachel might have said, only that she said it much better than poor Rachel could ever have done. To-night, it affected him more than he would have cared to own. He had come here perfectly aware of what Lady Ince expected of him. Her little remark about Father Blake had shown him quite clearly what was in her mind. This girl with her soft hands, her shining eyes, seemed to be pushing him towards that very goal. And how could he dare to go and seek Father Blake to-night? To experience again the self-humiliation in all its unredeemed bitterness that confession meant to him now? Yet, ever since that morning when he had met her coming out of church, this thought had been in his mind. It had tormented him even when he did not wish to think of it. He desired the very thing from which he shrank. And he had come to Abbot's End quite deliberately, knowing that the environment would probably prove too strong for him, and might even force him to his knees. He had wanted it to be so strong that it would triumph, indeed, over all his unwillingness. But now he was here, the old

difficulties rose up before him in formidable array. Let him finish his work in Millborough first! Let him defeat Hubert, so that the chances of his being returned at the next election would be reduced to a minimum. Then, and then only, could he make his peace with the Church. Impossible to dedicate, to consecrate, as she suggested, such work as his to the service of God. . .

"I advise you to go away," he said suddenly. "You will never be able to live in Millborough. It is a soul-destroying place, if you have a soul;—a heart-breaking place, if you have a heart. And if you want to play—to amuse yourself—you can't do it here!"

"I don't want to play. And it's my home. That makes a difference."

"I have been told that you are an orphan," he continued, "but wasn't there any alternative for you but Millborough? Was it the only place that could be found for you in your youth?" He would have added, "and in your beauty and innocence," but he did not dare.

"There was another alternative," she said slowly, feeling as if he were bent on dragging the information from her for some purpose of his own. "I could have remained in London with my aunt, Mrs. Corby. She wanted me to stay. She did not like my coming here."

"I don't know Mrs. Corby, except by name. But I'm sure it would have been a thousand times better for you to remain with her. You would have had, at least, security, a shelter, ignorance!"

"Hubert wanted me," she said simply.

Yet—was it really true? Had he ever wanted her, as much as she supposed? Did he really need her? She had sometimes felt that only his dislike to Mrs. Corby had prompted him to invite her with

such urgency. He was supremely self-centered. She was of no use in his house. He would have resented any change in existing arrangements. Her presence or absence could make no appreciable difference to him. He possessed already all the comfort and attention he required without any effort on her part.

Kemp seemed to share her unspoken doubts, for he almost immediately said: "He has contrived to look after himself admirably for a number of years." There was disdain in his tone; he did not try to disguise it. "And he has no right to condemn you to a life in Millborough. To sacrifice your youth—even a small portion of it—to his own selfish ends!"

"Don't discourage me, please!" She forced a smile. "I came here of my own free will. I had my choice, I chose Millborough. No one sacrificed me. I think almost everyone hoped that I wouldn't come! But it doesn't frighten me . . I can always go away, you see, if I don't like it."

Kemp shrugged his shoulders.

"That isn't always as easy as it sounds. Against your will, some places hold you . . imprison you . ."

Perhaps they were both relieved when the door opened and Lady Ince came into the room. A brief, constrained silence followed her entrance, then Audrey said:

"Mr. Kemp is very discouraging about my living in Millborough. He is so sure I shan't like it."

Lady Ince only said gently, with that effortless piety of hers:

"But if it is your duty to be there, it is your duty, too, to try and be contented and happy."

"That's what I feel about it, too," said Audrey, smiling up at her, "and my only fear is that Hubert won't want to keep me!"

Life seemed almost commonplace when Lady Ince

thus reduced it to the "good common way." It didn't hurt, then, or if it did, you knew how to bear it with courage and confidence. Kemp had surely only been trying to frighten her. He hated to have her there . . perhaps her very presence acted as a kind of restraint upon him. She was never able to feel, when he was talking to her, that he was quite indifferent to her. He insisted upon talking intimately, and seemed to take for granted the existence of a certain friendship between them.

"You see you must not listen to me," he said, almost with an effort. "One can never judge for another person."

"Miss Tressider is quite safe in her brother's hands. She must do as he wishes," said Lady Ince, with a touch of dignity. She wanted to make Kemp feel that Audrey's living in Millborough was a matter which did not concern him at all, and that he really had no right to express an opinion about it.

"One finds it so extraordinarily difficult to understand why he ever invited her to come!" he said.

"I do not think you should say that to his sister," said Lady Ince in a tone of gentle reproof.

"You are right. I beg your pardon, Miss Tressider."

Her smile won an answering one from him. She did not seem to be offended by his blunt words. And unless Tressider were blind and deaf to her charm, he must find her presence in his house an altogether delightful thing. He hoped that Millborough would never succeed in destroying or even impairing that careless confidence and courage of hers. . .

CHAPTER XV

MIDNIGHT MASS

AFTER dinner, they sat in the drawing-room for a short time, and then Lady Ince rose and said:

"Will you come upstairs, Audrey? Mr. Kemp, you know your way to the smoking-room. I hope you will find a good fire there."

It was little more than eight o'clock when Kemp thus found himself left alone. He repaired to the library which was also used as a smoking-room, and stood for a time examining the books that were arranged in neat rows upon the shelves. They had the look, he thought, of seldom being disturbed. Probably Lady Ince kept those for her own consumption in another place. One did not associate her with intellectual hunger. But to Kemp, the very sight of large quantities of books was intoxicating. He had never possessed enough to satisfy his own keen desire for knowledge. He had not been able to afford to buy them. He took up two or three volumes at random and drawing an arm-chair close to the fire he began to read.

The room was warm and comfortable. Lady Ince never imposed any austerities upon her guests; she kept them for her own personal use. She subjected her delicate body to privations; she taught it to endure cold and hunger and even pain. But she gave no hint of all this to the outside world. It was her own secret, jealously guarded. She would have felt confused and embarrassed if it had ever been discovered.

But to Kemp, the atmosphere of this tranquil, wealthy country-house was a trifle enervating. After his strenuous work he felt a little drowsy. He leaned his head back and the book dropped from his hand.

The clock striking half past eight aroused him. In another half hour Father Blake would emerge from his room, where he had been spending the whole evening, and would repair to the chapel. Kemp wished he could have seen the priest alone before that happened; he would like to have had a private intimate talk with him. . . He wasn't going, in spite of all that Lady Ince had said, to seek him out in the confessional to-night. But he fully intended to be present at Midnight Mass. That was really why he had come to Abbot's End. He would go into the chapel at half past eleven. Perhaps he would kneel beside the Crib. Perhaps he would try, as he had often done as a boy, to reconstruct the scene at Bethlehem—Bethlehem lying under the Syrian skies, lit by clear, frosty stars. The beauty . . the wonder of it. . . The Child and His Mother surrounded by the beasts that were sheltering, too, in that rude stable. The kneeling shepherds . . the Light in the Cave . . the blossoming straw in the Manger, the stir of wings. . .Perhaps the faint far echoes of *Gloria in Excelsis*. . .

How long was it since he had been to Midnight Mass? As a boy, he had been marshalled thither by Jane. He could see himself, a small shivering boy, half eager, half reluctant, clad in an inadequate overcoat; his chilblained feet roughly shod; his red hands uncovered. He had chafed, in those days, against his poverty, against the thrifty parsimony of Jane. Later, he had given up going, till once, about five years ago, he had attended Midnight Mass in one of the big fashionable West-End churches, in the hope of recapturing some of his boyhood's impressions. He had succeeded sufficiently to write a poem, *Midnight Mass*. Rather an effective

poem; it was included in the little volume that Rachel admired so passionately. . .

He moved restlessly in his chair. After all, why had he come to-night? It would have been so much simpler, would have involved him in so much less soul-searching, had he stayed in his rooms at Millborough. They were not very comfortable, and they were decidedly lonely, but he liked solitude. Lady Ince had, however, invited him in a kind and friendly note, and thus he had walked into a trap with his eyes open. Incapable of intrigue, Lady Ince had yet known how to bait her trap very skilfully. Without warning almost, he had been flung into the presence of Miss Tressider, and so full had his thoughts been of her, that her actual appearance was almost more like the realization of a dream than a mere surprise. . .

He rose, standing with his back to the fire. Seen thus in the sharp, white glare of the electric light he looked extraordinarily handsome in a wholly unconventional way. He could have sat then for some powerful study in black and white, so pale was his face, so curiously dark were his eyes and longish hair. There was something of the poet in his appearance, something, too, of the actor, but very little, just then, of the political agitator. A quarter to nine . . . Father Blake was perhaps even now getting ready to go down to the chapel. Kemp liked and admired the Dominican who, with a few friars, served a Mission-church in one of the poorest parts of Millborough. He lived a heroic life, and was already suffering from the first symptoms of that chest complaint which attacked so many of the workers in the poisonous, fume-laden air of the factories. But notwithstanding his admiration for him, Kemp also feared him. He was a man who could speak sternly, frankly, mercilessly.

Kemp wished that a strange priest had been at Abbot's End that night. Not one so thoroughly and intimately acquainted with this own public life. That alone would make it impossible—

The atmosphere of the house was affecting him strangely. Was each one of the inmates under this roof preparing at this moment to be present at the Feast? And he alone, perhaps, would go down as a sight-seer—as a mere worshipper—wearing no wedding-garment that should fit him to take his place among the rest. . .

What had she said? Something about dedicating his work to God! All very well, such a creed as that for sheltered, luxurious women. . . Go and tell the toilers in her brother's Works to dedicate their long hours of weariness to God! Would they not laugh? Would they not have a right to laugh, painfully, asthmatically, at such an idea as that? . . They were not saints, to offer their sufferings to the Man of Sorrows, begging humbly for a share in those Sorrows, that Agony. . .

Kemp was not an ignorant Catholic. His parents, and after their death, Jane had seen to that. He was perfectly aware of the divine part allotted to suffering in the great scheme of Salvation; its discipline, its important spiritual value, its supernatural end. But he had put impatiently from him all thoughts of religion, when he embarked upon his political campaign in Millborough. He meant to have a free hand. He could remember saying as much once to Father Blake, defiantly, angrily.

Nine o'clock. . . He simply could not stay in the library. He felt as if he were being driven forth. He went restlessly into the hall. The house was very still and silent, almost as if it were waiting for some august event. It was a tense silence. Not only the house, but the whole world was waiting.

Preparing in secret their gifts of gold, frank-incense and myrrh. . . Not remaining outside in the cold —synical, indifferent and callous—as if it were something that did not concern them. He felt certain that somewhere, at that moment, in the old house Lady Ince was praying. Praying, perhaps, for all the inmates that were assembled under its roof that night.

He walked down the long passage into the covered courtyard. Then he opened the further door that led into the garden, and stood outside for a few moments. The sky was very clear and the stars were bright and frosty. Orion's belt—a shining, glorious galaxy. . . So must they have gazed down nearly two thousand years ago upon the scene in Bethlehem, eclipsed perhaps by that mystic Light which marked the passage of singing, rejoicing angels. . .

He shut the door and went into the chapel. There, a very profound silence prevailed. Some candles guttered before a statue of Our Lady, cutting the gloom with a patch of quivering light. A red lamp hung before the Tabernacle. As Kemp passed he genuflected. Against his will he was submerged in ancient influences that held him powerfully. Strong waves of faith beat against him. His armor fell away. His very pride deserted him. Audrey's words echoed in his ears. "It must be fearful to have such a hatred in your soul for anyone, as you have for my brother. You've come here for Midnight Mass, and yet you won't put it aside even for a few hours. . ." Yes, she had laid her finger unerringly upon the apparent ambiguity and inconsistency of his conduct. And when she had spoken thus he had known that she was actuated by no petty and personal desire to save her brother from the possible effects of that hatred, that enmity. She was thinking only of Kemp's soul—a soul that was being engulfed and destroyed by this passion of hate. She

did not care for him—how should she? She must see in him the implacable enemy of her brother. But she did care for his soul—she would fain hold out pitiful human hands to save him. For such a gesture as that, eager, spontaneous, magnanimous, ought he not to show her an eternal gratitude? . .

He had rebelled against the soft insistence of Lady Ince. But Audrey's young fervor was a quality that caught and held him. She should never know how near he had been to loving her when she uttered those words! . .

There was a slight stir, and Kemp on looking round saw Father Blake enter the church. He was a tall man, and in his Dominican habit of black and white his bearing seemed almost majestic. Thin to emaciation, he had a narrow and long face with sharply drawn features, overhanging brows, and deep-set eyes of a curiously bright blue. He genuflected, knelt down, and remained for some moments in prayer. Then he rose and entered the confessional. He switched on an electric light inside the box, and taking up a book began to read, his lips moving.

Perhaps he was praying for guidance. Perhaps he was praying for all those souls who were to seek him to-night, in the tribunal of penance. Perhaps he was praying, as holy priests will, that not one of all of them might be lost.

But to go to him now? Kemp mocked at the idea. To lay bare his heart to Father Blake to-night? Yet, without that, he must remain as a spectator all through the Midnight Mass. The great joy and consolation of it could not be his, unless he nerved himself to pay for it by self-abasement, humiliation, even shame. It was asking too much of him—of any man. . . He had a futile longing to creep out and make his way back to Millborough, across the

frozen, unfertile fields, like a thief escaping in the night.

Almost against his will he stumbled to his feet and went into the confessional. It was a relief to hear Father Blake's matter-of-fact, unemotional voice uttering the preliminary blessing. Kemp felt his boyhood return to him. After all, it wasn't so hard, to a man trained and taught as he had been. . . . He had put the hardest part past him by the time he had knelt down on the low step and listened to those first words of blessing. . . Yes, he owed a good deal to the grim discipline of his boyhood . . *Ego te absolvo.* . . The familiar words fell upon his ears like sounding music. . .

Instead of going back to the house and up to his room, he spent the next three hours in the chapel. Nor did it seem to him that any appreciable interval had passed between the moment of his emergence from the confessional and until he saw Father Blake come in, wearing a white vestment, and accompanied by an acolyte go up to the altar. The three Christmas Masses followed each other, in majestic, dramatic succession. Once—as in a dream—Kemp went up to the Communion-rail and took his place among the other worshippers. It was as a suppliant he knelt there. He was the Prodigal Son, returning after long years to the house of his Father, to pray for the forgiveness that had always awaited him. The pardon—the absolution—the shoes for his feet—the ring for his finger—the garment of renewed innocence—the Mystic Feast for his soul. . . These things belonged to him to-night. It was impossible, after his up-bringing, for him to take his place among the men who believed they could ignore these things, who dispensed with them, denied their efficacy, and could live and die without them.

But into the future—the future at Millborough—he did not dare to look. . .

CHAPTER XVI

A WALK ON THE MOORS

BREAKFAST was late on Christmas day, and Kemp had been waiting for some time before Lady Ince appeared. Audrey came in later. She was looking a little tired and heavy-eyed, it was probably on this account that her hostess suggested they should go for a walk on the moors.

The morning was fine, and the pale blue sky was almost spring-like. There was a hint of frost in the air. The breakfast-room at Abbot's End looked out upon a wide country, the moors in the distance stretching like a long, dark shadow. The woods were coloured in tones of purple and umber, and made deep, blotted patches against the pale hills. Distant spaces were soft with grey mists, that seemed to suggest that the sea was not very far away.

"Just a turn on the moors," Lady Ince said, encouragingly, "I'm not a very good walker or I would come with you. And I must get ready for my poor people this afternoon. But you know the way, Mr. Kemp. . . . There's a view of the river, and on clear days you can see the shipping."

"Yes, I know the way," said Kemp.

He had a moment's fear that Audrey would make some excuse and refuse to accompany him. But she offered no objection.

As they left the house a little later, he said:

"We are turning our backs on Millborough!"

There was a hint of bitterness in his voice as he said the words, almost as if he had desired to convey a double meaning by them. And it was perfectly true. By going with him she was in a sense breaking free

from Millborough and its traditions, from the lessons she had learned there. She was ignoring, too, Hubert's commands, Hubert's wishes. Yet the thought did not trouble her. She hoped and believed that this visit to Abbot's End had really changed Kemp's heart, and that in future he would work from a different angle, actuated by higher motives. . .

As they walked on, she became more than ever aware of his great height. He was so much taller than any man she had walked beside—taller than Hubert, than Ninian—taller even than Myles Dorling. He looked an imposing, arresting figure, unconventional, difficult to "place" from a worldly point of view, but full of energy and purpose.

"I am going back to Millborough to-morrow with Father Blake. We are to help Lady Ince with her Christmas tree for the poor people this afternoon," he told her.

"And I am going home this afternoon," said Audrey.

"Yes," said Kemp. Then after a pause: "We shall perhaps not see each other again for a long time."

She was silent.

"Your brother would not be so complaisant as Lady Ince," he continued.

"No, I don't think he would. He would be against our meeting."

There was no regret in her voice, just a simple acceptance of an incontrovertible fact, an acquiescence that was without rebellion.

"And you?" He looked straight into her eyes as if to command an answer. "Would you be against it, too?"

She evaded the direct reply.

"I must do what Hubert wishes while I am living under his roof."

"It is a pity," he said, "for we could have been friends."

She wished he would not continue to talk to her in this personal strain. It made her feel that he was continually approaching something that must never be said between them. The conviction made her feel nervous.

It was not very far to the edge of the moors, those great tawnily-brown spaces with the deep purple and umber-coloured shadows. It was a desolate scene, but beautiful in its austerity. Here and there a cluster of wind-bitten fir trees stood darkly outlined against the sky. They climbed to the top of the hill and Kemp showed her the far, lovely view of the river, transformed by the pale sunlight into a stream of liquid pearl. Faintly drawn, were the masts and rigging of many ships lying there at anchor. Then he bade her abruptly turn her head, so that in the distance she could see Millborough lying in its cup, in a pool of dark smoke through which no details could be discerned. On this clear day they could see how far the smoke spread into the surrounding country, like some poisonous miasma blighting it, killing its growths of grass and verdure, and darkening even the sky above it. The sluggish river that flowed past its factories showed like a thin silver scarf, cutting the gloom. It seemed to Audrey then that Millborough looked like a city of dreadful night, a sinister place, the venue of strange secret tragedies. She looked at it for a moment and then turned her head away.

"Does it not remind you," said Kemp's passionate voice, "of Dante's Fifth Circle of hell? *Or ci attristiam nella belletta negra. . .*"

She gave a little shudder. He spoke the Italian words fluently and correctly, and he contrived to invest them with all the horror they possessed. Millborough was for him not so much a place of nebulous tragedy; it was tragedy itself.

"Won't you forget it to-day?" she said timidly.

"You expect too much of me."

Yet he, too, turned away from the contemplation of it. The cool, iced wind rushed over the moors with its message from the sea; it was buoyant, invigorating.

"I was in London last week," he said suddenly, "I went up to see my sister, who is dying."

"Dying? Oh, I'm so sorry," said Audrey.

Her quick sympathy touched him. He looked at her curiously.

"She has been ill for some time. We are going to arrange for her to move into the country—she will be better there. I am going on Tuesday to take her down to Gloucestershire, to a farm on the Cotswolds."

"I hope you may be mistaken. I hope she will get better there," said Audrey.

"She has not had a very happy life," he said. "I've wished to tell you about her." He hesitated. Hitherto, he had kept that side of his life rigourously from the few friends he had made in Millborough. Lady Ince, Miss Standen, and the Vandoms, for instance, knew nothing of the little house in the Bow Road. It did not seem necessary to speak of it to them. But Audrey made him feel that it would be easy to tell her of these things. Her attitude invited frankness. She would not think any the better or any the worse of him if she were to hear the details of his up-bringing—that forlorn up-bringing, rigid, penurious, severe, and intellectually starved.

"Tell me about her, please," said Audrey.

"Rachel is the youngest of us. She is just over thirty. I come between her and my sister Jane. But I have always been far more fond of Rachel. They are quite poor people, you know. They live in the East End. I used to live there too."

The information revealed nothing new to Audrey. She had always known that Kemp was a man of the people. He had lifted himself above the class in which he was born, by his own will and intelligence. He had talents of a high order. He had pluck and energy and perseverance. She had always known that he had risen from small beginnings—that was part of the legend. But she felt now, that he was making a deliberate confession of these things to her, so that she should have no illusions about him. She should know the exact measure of his poverty and insignificance. It touched her to a reluctant admiration.

"But, of course, you must always have known that I did not belong to your world," he continued.

As he spoke the scene with its fine effects of light and shade, the brown and the blue, the pearl and the grey, seemed to melt, and he saw again in all its grim detail the little room in the Bow Road, made hideous by the drunken presence of Jim Todd. He saw his sisters, Jane, hard-faced, grim and saturnine, Rachel, faded and delicate, and he compared them for one instant of acute pain with the woman standing by his side.

"Does it matter?" she said. He was building—as it seemed to her—new barriers between them. Yet in revealing so much of his past life to her, was he not also bidding her come nearer, so that she should understand and forgive all that perplexed her now?

"I could not expect you to realize the suffering that there can be in a life such as ours. It was a hard and bitter struggle for existence after our

parents died. And when Rachel married she suffered still more. He husband drank, ill-treated her, half-killed her. She wouldn't leave him till her health broke down. It was too late then."

"She must miss you," said Audrey.

"She knows that my work lies in Millborough." His face hardened.

"You still mean to stay?"

"Certainly; I am not going to leave my work here unfinished. There is sure to be an election soon—Smith is dying by inches, but he *is* dying. I shall contest the seat. Tressider won't have it all his own way, I can promise him."

"Why don't you contest some other seat?"

"Because I am out to help Millborough. I'm not going to leave my friends in that slough." His eyes blazed. "And perhaps the very fact that I'm fighting Tressider in open field adds zest to the conflict! Pardon me—you know I can never remember for five consecutive minutes that you're his sister! There must be twenty years between you, isn't there??"

"Sixteen. Ninian and I came long after Hubert. We hardly saw him when we were children. But he was always my mother's favourite."

"You'll have to plead his cause when the election comes on. You will have to canvass for him. Don't, please, get mixed up with my arguments. Believe that Millborough is a paradise. I would rather for your own sake, for your own peace of mind, that you shouldn't see it as it is. If you were once to see it as it is—as I see it— you would not stay there—you would find it unbearable, impossible!"

"Even then I should want to stay. . . I might find some means of helping. . ."

"With tickets for coal and food, I suppose? No, we do not want charity here. We want justice. The final calamity that could befall us would be to have Tressider returned as our member."

"Please do not try to touch my loyalty to Hubert," she said.

"Would it be very hard?"

"I think—I hope—that it would be very hard."

The sun was shining brilliantly over the wide brown spaces, that glimmered here and there with a sparkle of frost. Overhead little fleecy clouds drifted like unravelling wool across the clear pale blue.

"Are you as loyal to your friends as to your brother?"

"I try to be."

"You will hear no good of me, you know, from Tressider. But I ask you to remember me, to judge me, as I have seemed to you."

"Yes," she said. "I would rather do that."

"You may be tried very hard in the future."

"And you, too," she said eagerly, "won't you remember Tressider's sister, sometimes, when you are speaking of Tressider?"

For a second, the ugly thought flashed through his mind that she was of deliberate intent trying to influence him, politically, as well as religiously. Perhaps she had been encouraged to do this, seeing that matters in Millborough were rapidly approaching the breaking-point. Yet, was it possible she could have a motive—was lending herself to an intrigue? Had it all been planned, perhaps, by Lady Ince and Tressider? The visit to Abbot's End—this walk on the moors—that opportunity for private conversation that had been given to them last night? In that moment he suffered a pang of bitter distrust. Had they all discerned his growing interest in her, which he believed he had hidden from all the world? An interest that might, under more favourable conditions, have ripened into a sentiment more passionate as well as more enduring. And had they determined to use it as a weapon against him? . . . There must be some reason for his being permitted to meet her

thus, on terms that were almost intimate. Hubert knew—of course, he knew—he must have given his consent. Audrey's last speech had awakened these suspicions in his mind. She had asked him to remember her, when he was speaking of her brother. A hundred harsh and bitter things rose to his lips, but he did not utter them. He would be silent, but he would fight Tressider through her. Hubert should be paid back to the uttermost farthing. The wild triumph of teaching Audrey to love him! She was surely not indifferent, unless she was simply playing a part—the part Hubert had indicated to her. . . But all he said was: "You must not expect to redeem the irredeemable, Miss Tressider!"

If they had no scruples, neither would he have any. In a flash, he saw the nature of this new campaign, with this exotic element suddenly thrust into it. He saw it, move for move. Audrey herself was, perhaps, unaware; she was their tool, just as he was to have been their victim. And he knew himself to be their match; he was stronger, more powerful, more unscrupulous than Hubert Tressider. So they had sent this woman with her beautiful face, her soft voice, to win him over. At first, he had lent himself willingly. . . even last night he had suspected nothing. . . But here, also, he could defeat Hubert.

"You mustn't imagine," he said with a new hardness in his voice, "that because of last night I am simply going to throw up the sponge. I shall stay on, and I can't believe my work is anything but good and necessary. I shall stay till my people are better lodged, better fed, better paid." He looked at her with eyes that seemed to change and soften. "You might have helped me. It's a merciless bit of bungling on the part of fate that you should be . . Tressider's sister. . . "

"And I am proud to be Tressider's sister!"

Kemp's words sounded passionate, although in themselves they were not passionate. They hurt her, yet there was that in them that thrilled her. She felt as if she must have lived always in a dream, in a stupor, until his coming. He forced her to live, to feel. He roughly destroyed the old tranquillity and serenity of her life.

"Besides, what could I have done to help?" she said.

Kemp stopped still, and it was a perfectly genuine emotion that impelled him now to say:

"*Done?* You could have helped me—worked with me—*loved me!*" He flung the last words at her with an amazing violence. "Haven't you realized yet what you've done? I think I have loved you from the first moment I ever saw you!'

Audrey turned very white. While she assured herself that she had indeed never realized it, she felt in her heart that she must always have known. She had a queer sensation that the world was reeling about her, the brown moors, the blue sky, the white, wool-like clouds. He loved her. But perhaps he knew the hopelessness of that love, since he did not even now ask for hers in return. From the confusion and stress of the moment one thought emerged with an almost terrible clearness. If he had not been Hubert's open and avowed enemy, all other barriers would have been as wax . . trivial things that possessed neither substance nor reality.

She groped among shadows for any gleam of light to illuminate her path.

She was aware then that he was speaking, only now in a colder and more restrained tone.

"You must have seen what it meant to me—to be with you—to speak to you. You are not a child. . ." He threw back his head as if to feel the full force of that calm pure air, swift, keen, with

a touch of ice in it, but indescribably refreshing. "You are not blind—you must, at least, have guessed. What are you going to do?"

"I can do nothing. You must forget that you have said these things to me."

"And that is all the answer you can give?"

She bowed her head.

"You mean to remain on the other side?"

"Yes."

"You will sacrifice yourself—and me?"

"I am not making any sacrifice."

"I am nothing to you?" His eyes were fixed upon her face, demanding the truth.

"If you are anything, you are . . the friend I must never see!"

"*The friend I must never see!* . ."

"But still your friend?"

"If you don't forfeit that friendship."

Again that ugly little doubt of her came into his mind. This time however he drove it away.

"Whatever I do—whatever I say—remember that I love you," he said.

She longed to cry out and say: "There is only one real barrier between us, and it's of your own making." But all her loyalty to Hubert restrained her. No, Kemp must never know, he must never guess, that she loved him. She would hide the fact in her heart, from him, from all the world. . .

"We must go back—it's getting late. We have been out a long time," she said.

They turned back, and now in the distance they could see the grey gables and chimneys of Abbot's End outlined, mist-coloured, against a background of purple, leafless woods. The house lay in a hollow, and the hills behind it hid it from Millborough.

They walked back almost in silence. Once or twice Kemp looked up at that fresh sky with its

hurrying clouds of whipped foam and curd, and tried to recover that feeling he had had on setting forth on "the perfect day when we both were young," but it had slipped past him, as it seemed, forever. Happiness had brushed him lightly with her wing . . and passed on.

In the midst of his misery and hopelessness he could find comfort in the thought that Audrey was no longer ignorant of his love.

CHAPTER XVII

"IF ONLY YOU HAD NOT BEEN TRESSIDER'S SISTER!"

AUDREY was in her room that afternoon, preparing for departure, when she heard a motor swiftly approaching along the avenue that led up to the house. Her window looked out to the front, and as she stood near it she watched the car stop. The door was opened from within, and to her surprise and consternation she saw Hubert descend from it.

Why had he come? Had he heard in Millborough some rumour of Kemp's presence at Abbot's End? She could see him, as he stood there on the steps, during the brief interval that elapsed between his ringing of the bell and the opening of the door. And as she looked at him her heart sank. Seen thus, when he did not know that anyone was observing him, his face struck her as a curiously cruel one. The icy air had given him a cold, nipped look, which made his face appear bleak, even a little mean. She felt as if she were regarding a stranger, coldly, critically. For he was a stranger, this man under whose roof she as now sojourning. Kemp's opinion of him influenced her for the first time. She saw him as hard, narrow, intolerant, egotistic. Audrey shrank back so that the curtain almost hid her. Did he know that Kemp was there? Had he come to ascertain the truth for himself? Would he question her? Would he perhaps force her to speak, and even to reveal all that had passed, so tumultuously, between them?

It was, perhaps, in that moment that she first realized the depth of her feeling for Kemp. It was not so much that she loved him, as that he had become dear to her in a special and intimate sense. She

needed his friendship. She could not banish him out of her life. She could not be guided by a blind, mistaken impulse of loyalty to Hubert. Kemp's warm, magnetic personality gave her a sense of highly increased vitality. Only when he was there, did she feel fully and passionately alive. It had nothing to do with happiness, for sometimes he disturbed her to such a point that she felt actively miserable. There was nothing suave and easy in their intercourse. He had hard lessons to teach her, and yet he gave her courage to bear the ordeal. As she glanced again at Hubert's dry, cold face she contrasted the two men, and she saw herself instinctively drawing away from Hubert . . approaching Kemp.

Hubert had passed now out of her sight. In a few minutes she would have to go down-stairs and meet him, as if nothing had happened during the twenty-four hours of their separation. Now that he was really inside the house, she felt a little afraid. Mingled with her fear, there was a strong excitement that made her limbs tremble. Would he discover the presence of Kemp? Would Lady Ince mention it, perhaps, in her guileless, unsuspecting unworldliness? Audrey resolved that, if possible, she would not be present at a meeting of the two men. She did not wish to see them side by side. She was Tressider's sister, and a fine instinct of loyalty bade her remember the fact. But Kemp loved her, and even if she did not yet tell herself that she loved him, the knowledge of his love thrilled her with its glamour. She mechanically re-constructed the scene on the moors—the wide spaces of tawny-brown, of pale blue and white, of pearl and grey. She was listening again to Kemp's words; she saw his burning eyes fixed upon her face. He loved her, and for Hubert's sake she had repudiated that love. . .

Lady Ince's voice, calling her from without, broke upon her ear. She went to the door and opened it.

"Audrey dear—I'm just going down to see Hubert. He has come to fetch you himself. Come down as soon as you are ready."

Audrey's face was very white, and it was set in unconsciously stern lines.

"Do you think he knows that Mr. Kemp is here?" she said, in a controlled voice.

"I haven't seen him yet, so I can't say. But Mr. Kemp is in the chapel now. . ."

"In the chapel!" repeated Audrey.

Then an idea suddenly occurred to her. She caught Lady Ince's hand.

"It would be better not to tell Hubert!" she said desperately. "If he hasn't heard, please don't tell him."

Although she was so quiet, there was a note of urgent appeal in her voice which did not escape Lady Ince.

"Very well, my dear. Now I must go down to him."

Audrey put on her outdoor things, the heavy winter coat, the broad-brimmed black hat, the stole of black fox. Then she ran downstairs into the drawing-room. Lady Ince and Hubert were talking. It was a relief to find them engaged in quite ordinary conversation.

"Well, Audrey?" Hubert's face relaxed slightly, and he bent his head to kiss her forehead. "Are you ready? If Lady Ince will excuse us we ought to be off."

"I am just ready, Hubert. But I want to go for a moment into the chapel before we start."

She went quickly out of the room. Even if she did not see Kemp she must kneel there for a second, unite her prayers to his. She ran down the passage

and into the courtyard. She noticed in passing, some forced lilies-of-the-valley that stood there in pots and filled the heated corridor with their sweet, heavy scent. When she came to the chapel she paused, and for a moment all courage seemed to leave her. Then she pushed open the door.

Kemp was kneeling in the far corner of the church. His head was bowed on his hands; his whole attitude was deeply meditative. She genuflected and then knelt down. No, she could not disturb him. She whispered a prayer for herself and him. It touched her inexpressibly to know that he was praying. Life would surely be different for him, now that he was completely reconciled to the Church.

Kemp turned his head suddenly and his dark melancholy eyes rested upon her. He rose and came towards her. Together they left the chapel and stood in the little vestibule outside.

"I am going. Hubert has come himself to fetch me."

They faced each other. Audrey was trembling a little; she leaned against the wall for support.

Kemp did not speak.

"Hubert—is in a hurry. He wants to get back to Millborough. I must not stop. . . ."

"And this is good-bye," said Kemp, taking her hand and holding it in his.

"Yes," said Audrey.

She did not take her hand away; his touch comforted her, strengthened her. . .

"Oh, my dear, my dear," he said in a voice full of emotion, "if only you had not been Tressider's sister!"

Her eyes were very bright, and he felt that she was being swayed by some strong, interior emotion.

"You must not ask me to forget that," she said. She had some difficulty in speaking.

"Very well. I hope I shall never ask anything of you that you are not ready to give."

He was aware that it hurt her to say good-bye to him in this definite and final way. More than that he did not ask to know. She was tied by her loyalty to her brother. It was one of those beautiful, gracious qualities that he admired in her, and would not change. . .

He lifted her hand to his lips. It was not the moment to tell her again that he loved her. But they both felt strongly the presence of that love.

"Good-bye," he said.

The tears were in her eyes. "Good-bye."

He went back to the chapel. Audrey made her way almost blindly back down the long corridor to the drawing-room. In the hall she paused to look at herself in an old mirror that hung there. Yes, she looked just as usual. No one would guess anything, least of all, Hubert. She flung back her head with the old proud gesture. No one should know that she was hurt, mortally hurt. . .

"I am quite ready, Hubert."

She felt as she stood there in front of her brother that she was deliberately holding out her hands to receive the chains that he would presently slip upon her wrists, to bind her to him, to his interests, opinions, wishes.

"You're looking very white, Audrey."

"Audrey was up so late. We were not in bed till after two," said Lady Ince.

She held the girl to her, kissing her. "It's been such a pleasure to have you—You must come again."

"Thank you for having me," said Audrey.

All this time she did not look at Hubert. It was as if she were afraid to meet his gaze. The interview with Kemp had unnerved her. She felt as if something of the truth must be written in her face.

"Come!" said Hubert, briskly, authoritatively.

Audrey obeyed. They left the room together. When they were both seated in the car Hubert drew the rug over his sister's knees.

"Is anything the matter, Audrey?" he asked.

"No, Hubert. Why should there be?"

"You look so queer—so white—and you're trembling. I hope you are not going to be ill."

"Oh, I'm sure I'm not going to be ill."

"I hope you enjoyed yourself?"

"Yes, thank you."

"When you came into the drawing-room just now you gave me the impression that you hadn't. . ."

"It was a false impression," she said nervously.

"Anybody else there?"

"Yes, Father Blake."

"No one else?"

"One . . man. . ."

Audrey leaned her face towards the window at her side, averting it from Hubert.

"A man?" Hubert repeated the word in astonishment. "Why, I imagined that you'd be quite alone with Lady Ince! Who in the world did she contrive to dig out for your benefit? No one from Millborough, surely?"

His curiosity was strongly aroused.

"It was—someone from Millborough," said Audrey in a low tone.

"Yes. But who?"

His excited manner conveyed the impression to her that he at least suspected the identity of that other guest.

"Tell me at once, Audrey! Of course, I wish to know. Why are you making such a mystery about it?" His voice was peremptory.

They were safely away from Abbot's End by this time, and the car was whirling down the long, ugly

road that led to Millborough. Low sterile-looking fields stretched desolately away on either side of them. The smoke from the Millborough factories hung over the landscape like a pernicious blight.

There was little chance, therefore, of Hubert's returning thither to create a scene. And confession could make no difference now. His anger could not affect her. She had said good-bye to Kemp. She had been faithfully loyal to Hubert. Surely, he must see how loyal she had been, although he must never know the extent of her sacrifice.

"I am afraid you will be very angry Hubert. But you must blame Lady Ince. The man was Mr. Kemp!"

"Kemp!" repeated Hubert. He had himself well in hand, but an ugly light came into his eyes. Little veins stood out on his pale parchment-like forehead. She saw his fingers close convulsively over his palms. He was angry—very angry, and his silence made her afraid.

"Did you know he was to be there?" he inquired at last. "Look at me, Audrey!"

She turned her face and met his eyes squarely. Hubert switched on a little electric light and surveyed her with a cruel scrutiny.

"I did not know."

"Did you talk to him alone?" His eyes in their steel-like hardness did not swerve from her face.

"Yes, Hubert."

"I hope you showed him that you resented being thrust into his company?"

She shook her head. Had she not sought him of her own free will for that final farewell, during which he had raised her hand to his lips?

"Were you together much?" His voice had a hard, rasping sound. "This morning, for instance? What did you do this morning?"

"I went for a walk. . . ."

"With Kemp?"

"Yes." She shrank a little away from him. His cold anger was terrible.

"Alone with Kemp? You went alone?—"

"Yes, Hubert."

"You were seen then walking openly with this man who never misses an opportunity of reviling me?"

"Yes."

"You—my sister—with this man who hates me—who is trying to ruin me?"

"I couldn't help it, Hubert. Lady Ince herself suggested that we should go."

"It would have been perfectly easy for you to make some excuse. If she does not know the circumstances you should have taken her aside, and explained them to her. But you know you ought not to have gone. I have made my wishes on the subject of Kemp quite plain to you. I've forbidden you to know him—to speak to him."

"It was Christmas day. We had all been to Midnight Mass together—it would have been difficult for me not to do as she wished."

"Please don't make any sentimental excuses. I must tell you plainly, Audrey, that I'm not going to keep you here to defy me. I never bargained to look after a deceitful, disobedient, rebellious girl. I shall send you back to Aunt Cynthia."

"I am very sorry Hubert. You must see that it wasn't quite my fault. And please don't send me away."

"I shall certainly not keep you here to be an additional burden. I have quite enough on my hands. You are doing the very thing I have forbidden. You meet this man—you talk to him—you walk with him—and you use your religion as an excuse. But it isn't my religion, and I don't choose to have you the

talk of Millborough. Do you aspire to succeed Evangeline Standen in Kemp's affections? Mrs. Standen will certainly be everlastingly grateful to you if you succeed in detaching him!"

She felt the hot colour mounting to her forehead. For one horrified moment she felt that Hubert would actually penetrate to the secret she had resolved to hide eternally from him, from all the world. The secret of Kemp's love. . .

"I don't suppose I shall ever see him again, Hubert," she said.

"I shall take good care of that. I am astonished that Lady Ince should have let you go for a walk with that common bounder!"

She had an impulse, swiftly checked, to say something wild and vehement in defence of Kemp. But the words died on her lips. She knew that she could not defend him without revealing something of what was within her heart. And Hubert had power to hurt her. He could banish her from Millborough. She felt as if she were beating her hands against a stone wall. If she opposed him, defied him, she would only emerge grievously hurt. He was implacable, and in his attitude towards her there was something of cruelty. Yet for his sake she had received Kemp's avowal of love in silence. . .

"Are you going to obey me? Will you promise not to see this man again?"

"Hubert . . how can I promise? I might meet him at Lady Ince's, or at the Standens! You know he goes to these places. And if he is there I can hardly pass him by without recognizing him. I will try to obey you in all possible ways. . ."

She was humble enough now. Even her pride was cowed into unwilling submission. After all, he reflected, the subdual of her would not be a very

difficult process. She must learn to bend to his will, and then perfect harmony would exist between them.

"Only let me stay with you, Hubert. Please let me stay."

"On condition, then, that you obey me in this matter. The first time I hear of your meeting or speaking to Kemp, I shall send you back to Aunt Cynthia, within twenty-four hours."

He was relieved to think that such a threat as that, of the kind one might use to an insubordinate child, had the power to bring her, so to speak, to her knees.

"You must understand," he continued in a more suave tone, "that the society about here is very mixed. It isn't at all what you must have been accustomed to at Aunt Cynthia's, for instance. And having been so much abroad, you may have become too cosmopolitan to discern class-distinctions as clearly as you should. You must follow my advice. I am a great deal older than you, and I am perfectly competent to guide you. You need guidance, Audrey. And out of loyalty to myself you will use every effort to avoid this man who is not at all a fit person for you to know."

Her beautiful, mobile face was very pale now. She listened to him, and as she listened all her freedom seemed to perish. If she wished to remain with him she would have to conform utterly to his will. She felt, then, that between him and Kemp she would be assuredly ground to dust, as between the upper and the nether millstones. These two men were enemies, bitter hostile enemies, and both were seeking to control her very thoughts.

But, at least, she had gained a reprieve. He was not going to banish her this time. She was to receive another trial.

The winter dusk had fallen by the time they reached the Hall, accomplishing the last part of the journey in an unbroken silence. As they descended from the car, a cold wind blew in their faces, bringing with it disagreeable odours from the factories and canals of Millborough.

Hubert remained behind to give some orders to the chauffeur, and Audrey going straight into the house went up to her own room and shut the door. A fire was burning in the grate, and the blinds were still raised, so that the room seemed to be full of the cool blue dusk of a winter twilight. In one corner stood a little altar where a light burnt before a statue of Our Lady of Reparation. Moved by a sudden impulse, Audrey knelt down for a moment before it. She began to pray brokenly. Her tears flowed freely now. All the time she had been with Hubert she had been too proud to let him see her cry.

"You could have helped me—worked with me—loved me. . . ." She was back on the moors, and Kemp's passionate words were echoing in her ears. But she might not help him, might not work for him, and if she loved him he must never know it. Hubert had taught her the precise measure of that love. Kneeling there, she seemed to make sacrifice of it, as of the one dear and precious thing she possessed.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. GRAZEBROOK PAYS A CALL

HUBERT made no further allusion to her visit to Abbot's End when they met at dinner that night. The meal passed quietly and pleasantly. No guests had been invited to share the Christmas dinner, for Hubert had little taste for promiscuous hospitality. But on the whole, he was glad to have his sister there, and he admitted the fact to himself with the grain of caution that was habitual to him. She must not be permitted to know of this satisfaction which was based chiefly upon a complacent approval of her charming, decorative presence. Seeing her thus, bright-eyed, and with a rare tinge of colour in her face, he almost regretted that he had been compelled to speak so sternly to her. But the severity was necessary. She had had an unconventional bringing-up, chiefly abroad; she had been far too little with her parents, and she had thus grown independent, was prone to act for herself, spontaneously and unconsciously, without reference to anyone else. But in a place like Millborough, that would never do. It was not the first time she had shown signs of that independence of judgment and action; he had in fact been rather waiting for an opportunity to "put her in her place." He felt that this had now been done, thoroughly and efficaciously. There would be no more talk of Kemp, he sincerely trusted. But his attitude towards Kemp was always one of jealous distrust. The man had a trick of appealing to women, even to nice women like Lady Ince. Hubert feared his influence. He feared above all things that he might secretly acquire an influence over his sister. He was capable of making the effort, and

Audrey was very young. Hubert resolved to go over to Abbot's End as soon as possible, for the sole purpose of expressing his views on the subject to Lady Ince. She must not bring about any more meetings between Kemp and Audrey. Her motive for having done so was, no doubt, a good one, but she must learn how strongly he objected to it—objected, to the point of banishing Audrey from Millborough, if, indeed, it should happen again. It was his duty, he reflected, to mould and train Audrey while she was under his roof. His sixteen-years' seniority must surely give him a certain authority over her. She must learn to yield to his will. Within these limits, she would have perfect liberty. But he had a right to exact submission and obedience. . . . And afterwards she would be grateful to him.

Had he known of the tumultuous thoughts that were raging behind that pale brow of hers, he might have felt a certain dismay at the task he had set himself to do. Thoughts that had lent that brightness to her eyes, that colour to her cheeks, that wonderful air of vitality to her whole appearance. . . .

She said suddenly: "I found letters from Aunt Cynthia when I came in. She sent me on two—from Ninian and Sir Myles Dorling."

"Dorling!" repeated Hubert.

"Yes—he wrote giving me news of Ninian. He knew I should be anxious to hear. So far, he was quite well and happy and had enjoyed the voyage."

Hubert cleared his throat.

"You are not," he hazarded, "fretting over Dorling's absence, are you?"

"Fretting?" she said, looking at him in amazement, "why should I fret over that? It was rather a relief, than otherwise, when he went away. I should have been glad—if he had not taken Ninian!"

"Aunt Cynthia hinted to me that he wished to

marry you. You were quite right, I think, not to allow a formal engagement before he left. You are free to think it over—to study your own heart. But when he returns, I hope you will realise what an important marriage it would be. He is a rich man, and in every way worthy of you."

"You are making a mistake, Hubert," she said quickly, "I shall never marry Sir Myles. I refused him quite definitely."

"Refused him!" repeated Hubert, angrily.

"Yes. I don't love him. I'm not going to marry him. I am sure he understands that." She spoke with determination.

"In another year I hope you may be wiser," said Hubert.

His steel-bright eyes were fixed upon her with the merciless scrutiny she had learnt to dread. She dreaded it the more now that she was guarding a secret from him.

"I could never care for him," she said.

"You are very young, and you have so far little knowledge of the world. At your age one makes mistakes. This man was in every way suitable. You should encourage your mind to dwell upon him, upon his obvious attachment to you. Most girls of your age would have felt honoured by his preference. I think you would come in time to see what a solution of your future such a marriage would be. You are not penniless, you will have five hundred a year when you come of age. You can even have it sooner if you marry with the approval of your trustees."

"I shall never marry Sir Myles. If I ever marry, it will be because I love, and for no other reason. And I believe some day I shall meet someone whom I shall love *malgré moi*, and that perhaps I shall marry him."

Hubert's cold glance rebuked her into sudden silence. She had spoken impulsively, rashly, with a certain warm vehemence that aroused his suspicions and awakened a hundred tormenting fears in his heart. Besides, the girl who was capable of refusing Myles Dorling was capable of almost any folly! . .

"You should repress such thoughts and not utter them," he said, in his stern, sententious tones. "I believe that many foolish ill-bred people have these absurd and even degrading notions. You make me feel," and now he smiled, a wintry, sardonic smile, "as if your mind were already contaminated by intercourse with this man Kemp. He came from the gutter, and no doubt some of its unsavouriness still clings to him."

She was silent, and he thought that she looked for the moment confused, like a child who has been suddenly and unexpectedly reprimanded. He saw in her then, less the pliable, receptive creature of his imagination, than the complex, mutinous woman who must at least have shown a certain friendliness to Kemp. Yet, he never doubted his own capacity to subdue this young ardent, and flame-like spirit. . .

"If you talk like that," he continued, "I shall be more than ever afraid to have you here. You might imagine yourself to be in love *malgré vous* with one of my factory hands."

She felt the cold and deliberate insult in every nerve. The words, lightly but decisively spoken, had aroused within her a feeling of actual fear lest he should have guessed her secret.

She wondered if Kemp's words were going to prove true, and that her youth, or at least a portion of it—would be sacrificed in Millborough. Hubert's rule was going to grind fine; she had had two samples of it that day. Yet it was absolutely necessary to yield to it, if she wished to remain with him. And she was willing to sacrifice a great deal, to remain in

Millborough. *"Out of loyalty to myself you will use every effort to avoid this man."* Yet, it was not Kemp who strained her loyalty to breaking-point, it was Hubert himself. He made her long to cry out in sheer rebellion against his mandate; to break the chains he had fastened upon her hands . . the chains that bound her to him. Against her will, she saw in Hubert the hard, pitiless man whom Kemp hated.

A few days later, Audrey was sitting in the room which Hubert had given up to her for her own use. She had already managed to make it look comfortable, and it bore a striking contrast to the other apartments at Millborough Hall. Audrey, rebelling against the drabness, the bleak pallor of the house, had contrived to make her room brilliant with colour. She had picked up a few pieces of old furniture in Millborough, and had arranged her books on white shelves that ran round three sides of the walls. The outlook was the only thing that displeased her, but there was no other room available. Situated over the front door, it looked straight towards Millborough, and she could see the tall chimneys, emerging like dim obelisks from the surrounding smoke that enveloped the town at all seasons and poured its malodorous fog over the country. Sometimes, when she opened the windows, suffocating odours assailed her. Even the laurel bushes in the garden below were stunted and blighted, and the grass grew grudgingly on the patch of lawn. It seemed to her fantastically, as if the place were under a curse. She thought of Kemp's words: *Or ci attristiam.* . . It had hardly astonished her to hear him quote Dante.

This afternoon a fierce north-easterly gale was blowing, and even in her room with its bright fire, she felt cold. There was a promise of snow in the leaden, opaque sky. The afternoon stretched before her, dull, a little solitary. Hubert was as usual down

at the Works. She had lunched alone. She had come in late from Mass that morning, and he had nearly finished breakfast when she returned, so that they had hardly seen each other that day. Hubert was very busy; he seemed preoccupied, he took little notice of her. The thought saddened her. He would only, perhaps, notice her when she annoyed him. And she was careful to avoid annoying him, to guard her speech, to watch over herself continually. But the monotony of the days oppressed her, no less than the repression of those qualities that for the first time displeased those about her, calling for rebuke and reprimand. She was outwardly cold and calm, yet, a wild rebellion surged too frequently within her heart.

As she stood there, her eyes on the desolate landscape that seemed now to be subtly interwoven with her present life, a large luxurious-looking motor-car came along the road. It turned in at the white gates and approached the house, scarcely slackening speed till it stopped abruptly before the front door. Audrey, half-hidden by the curtain, was able to perceive a tall figure, gracefully languid, emerge and come up the steps. A few minutes later a servant came to tell her that Mrs. Grazebrook had called to see her.

Audrey went quickly downstairs. Although she had stayed in her house, she was neither particularly friendly nor particularly intimate with Gertrude Grazebrook. Her mother and Mrs. Standen had been acquaintances of long standing, and when Mrs. Tressider had stayed at Millborough with her son, she had almost always spent a few days at Crayton where the Standens lived. But Crayton was a long way from Millborough, it was certainly not within calling distance, and Audrey was a little astonished and even perplexed at the visit. That the Standens

received Kemp, more or less, she was aware. It was said, too, that Mrs. Standen refused to invite him now, because of Evangeline's marked predilection for him.

For an appreciable moment Audrey felt actual alarm that Mrs. Grazebrook's visit might be in some way concerned with Kemp. If this were the case, it did not immediately transpire, for her visitor began to question her eagerly on the subject of Ninian and of Myles Dorling. She sat there by the fire, looking extraordinarily pretty in a strange, unusual, individual fashion. She wore a dress and hat of black velvet and an immense fur coat with a large collar of black fur, and the effect of this opulent, dark attire was to set off to great advantage her curious colourlessness, her clear pale eyes, her scarlet mouth.

"But I didn't come only to pay a call," she said presently; "I came to take you back with me to Sonya Vandom's. She's giving a musical party this afternoon, and we all motored over to lunch there. She has persuaded Bertie to sing, and so I mustn't be late—he won't sing unless I'm there. Queer creatures men are, aren't they? Bertie and I don't care a hang about each other really, and yet he hates it when I'm not there. I knew you'd be sitting here all alone like Mariana in her moated grange—they tell me Hubert keeps you quite shut up! Is it really true? It's a shame if it is—you're much too young and pretty to have such a thin time as all that! Well, as I say, we've been lunching with Sonya, Evangeline, Bertie, and Wanford and I, and I made a heavy bet with Wanford that I'd take you back."

"But I don't know Mrs. Vandom," said Audrey perplexed, "and then how should I ever get home again? And I'm afraid, too, that Hubert wouldn't like me to go. I don't think he cares for the

Vandoms—he never goes there. I've heard him say so."

"My dear child, how perfectly brilliant of you to think of so many objections all at once! But not one of them holds water. You shall come back in a motor—if not in mine, in someone else's. You'll be home easily before half past seven. Don't tell me that the Great Bear is so unfashionable as to dine before half past seven." She laughed merrily. "You mustn't be offended, we all call him that. Isn't it a good name?"

Audrey's face was unresponsive; she did not smile. She was possessed with the dread—nay the hope—that Kemp might be there. But if so, Hubert, hearing of the escapade, would be certain to conclude that she had gone there purposely to meet him. And then he would be angry—he would send her away. She would have to leave Millborough. Was it worth while for the sake of a few hours' relief from boredom? She weighed the matter in her mind. Mrs. Grazebrook's voice struck in, with a hint of impatience.

"You mustn't be all day making up your mind or we shall be too late."

She held out a slim foot daintily shod to the blaze.

"I'm so afraid that Hubert would be vexed," said Audrey.

Since her return from Abbot's End she had seen no one except Hubert at rare, uncertain intervals. Far from dining before half past seven it was often nearly nine o'clock before he returned to the cold supper that was always provided when he came in late. During those days Audrey had not been further than the garden, except to go to Mass in the early morning. The narrowness, the monotony of her present life, were pressing heavily upon her youth and spirits. She was wasting the precious days, the precious years. . .

"Do you really mind so much if he's vexed or not?" said Mrs. Grazebrook, carelessly. "You're not afraid of him, are you? Besides he's not a husband—you can go away from him whenever you like without starting any scandal. That must be a very comfortable, delightful feeling!"

"But I don't want to go away," said Audrey.

"Now run along and put on your things," said Gertrude good-naturedly, rather as if she were addressing a small child, "we must positively go. Are you coming, Audrey? Don't give in to Hubert too much. It isn't good for a man to have his own way always!"

"I'll come," said Audrey. She moved still hesitatingly towards the door.

When she was half-way across the room she paused.

"You're sure that Mrs. Vandom won't mind?"

"Mind? Why should she mind? She'll be only too delighted. She is dying to see you and so is Wanford. We didn't know how to get hold of you, until I suddenly proposed fetching you myself. Wanford and Bertie have both heard rumours of your beauty, and of Myles Dorling's infatuation for you. I really imagined you would be engaged to him before he left for Africa."

Audrey's face was distressed. "Oh, please don't say that." Her voice held a sharp note of entreaty. "I—I don't wish to marry him. We shall never be engaged."

She hurried out of the room, leaving Gertrude to reflect upon this last speech.

"She must, indeed, be a little goose if she refused him," she said to herself, "and as for this story about her and Kemp I simply don't believe that he's ever set foot in this house. I wonder if they did meet at Abbot's End or whether Hubert got wind of who

was to be there?" She continued these musings until Audrey re-appeared.

Gertrude surveyed her with a close and critical approval.

"You look perfectly charming," she said frankly, "you will have a clamourous success, as they say in Italy! Now do tell me why you are so afraid of the Great Bear. Has he been showing his claws, or teeth, or whatever it is that bears do show?"

"If you mean Hubert," said Audrey, moving with Mrs. Grazebrook towards the hall, "I'm only afraid of vexing him. You see he's so much older than I am, he feels he has a right to say what I am to do. He is stern, of course, but he doesn't mean to be unkind."

"Unkind?" Mrs. Grazebrook caught at the words. "I should think not, indeed! He ought to be only too proud that you have consented to come down and live with him in this dull, poisonous hole! He has hardly a friend in the place, and it must make an enormous difference to him to have you here!"

Audrey shook her head.

"No, I don't think he cares as much as that. He is so very busy, so preoccupied. There are days when I hardly see him."

"You poor little thing!" said Mrs. Grazebrook compassionately; "well, he'll grind you to powder in any case, so perhaps it's as well you should give in to him at first start-off."

Audrey pulled her furs more closely about her throat, for the wind felt like ice and almost stung her face. She followed Mrs. Grazebrook into the car, and they were soon spinning along the bleak, dull roads towards Reddell Park where the Vandoms lived in much magnificence.

CHAPTER XIX

"I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU ALWAYS!"

REDDELL PARK was a huge and rather ugly Georgian building, fashioned of yellow bricks that had now become grey with years. Its square front with the large, symmetrically-arranged windows faced you as you came up the long elm avenue. As Mrs. Grazebrook and Audrey drove up, they could hear the sleepy, resentful cawing of homing rooks. The park stretched away on each side until it met the famous beech woods on the one hand, and the cold, sluggish stream of the Redd on the other. It was in the opposite direction to Millborough, and here the land was fertile and cultivated, and the water-meadows were vividly green even now, in winter-time.

Mrs. Vandom was a Jewess, but not of a pronounced type. Her husband was a Dutch Jew, short, swart, stout, with an abrupt, rude manner. His wealth was reputed to be enormous. Sonya Vandom was dressed to-day in almost Oriental splendour, and there were not wanting people to whisper that she had had a Persian grandmother, and hence her dark skin, her wonderful Eastern eyes. As she moved about the fine spacious rooms, steam-heated until their atmosphere was almost tropical, she looked like a brilliant, flitting butterfly. Her bright blue silk dress was fashioned of Chinese embroideries and patterned with gold; she had gold shoes on her absurdly small feet. She wore, too, innumerable ornaments of diamonds and emeralds of fantastic shape, commemorating chiefly the dogs, cats, and birds that had for a brief period enjoyed her affectionate, if ephemeral, regard. She glittered, she

rustled, she diffused an atmosphere of some penetrating, Egyptian perfume. She was so highly coloured that she defied and even destroyed existing values. She seemed to throw other women into the shade, and to enjoy doing so. Yet, she was not beautiful. At the best, she could only be described as strange and magnificent, at the worst, showy and vulgar.

Mr. Vandom had married her ten years ago when she was nineteen. She was a great heiress, and he had wanted money. It was, indeed, the only thing he ever did want passionately. He believed that he could mould her to his own taste, and that she would become a sober-minded careful woman, devoted to her children, of whom there would, of course, be a large number. None of these pleasing hopes had been fulfilled. Their son, St. Aubyn, was now nine years old, and he had neither brothers nor sisters. Sonya was still precisely the same Sonya, except that she had become in course of years a slightly exaggerated edition of the girl he had married. She was more noisy, more daring in speech and action, more extravagant, more experienced, too, in the innumerable ways in which she could and did set his authority at defiance. She possessed an intimate knowledge of the cost of things, and could ask, "How much is it?" in seven languages. No Levantine Jew, it would be safe to say, could have got the better of her in a bargain. It was the only characteristic that Mr. Vandon wholly admired in her. Metaphorically speaking, he would have taken off his hat to her on this count.

Their son, a pale, unwholesome, puffy-faced boy, stood near her as she greeted her guests. He was the idol of her heart, and the Vandoms found in him a fresh and perennial source of violent dissension.

The room was very full when Mrs. Grazebrook entered it, accompanied by Audrey. The clash of tongues rose in an increasing crescendo above some distant piano-playing.

"I'm so glad you've come, Miss Tressider." Mrs. Vandom held out a small, plump, much be-ringed and highly-manicured hand to her guest. "I'm astonished though that your brother let you, all the same! He doesn't like me, and he won't set foot inside in the place, will he, Binny?" She appealed to the boy at her side, who regarded her with heavy lack-lustre eyes in which there was a veiled contempt.

He was of a pronounced Semitic type, resembling his father, swart with a large head, a long nose, full lips and a black mop of curly hair. His mother thought him adorable. She over-fed him, over-indulged him, and resisted all her husband's attempts to enforce a more rigourous discipline.

"It was very clever of Gertrude to bring you," continued Mrs. Vandom, her eyes wandering restlessly over the little groups of people who had already assembled. "You know Miss Tressider, I think, Mr. Kemp? I really wonder why you were ever allowed to meet!" She laughed in a high, shrill penetrating way, and after effecting this introduction, turned to greet some other arrivals.

Audrey found herself standing face to face with Kemp, and it seemed to her that they were left there together almost in isolation. If the whole thing had been a plot to surprise and confuse her it could hardly be said to have succeeded, so admirably hidden was the astonishment, the consternation she felt.

Not far off she could see Mrs. Grazebrook, who seemed to be watching her attentively. By her side stood a girl with magnificent red hair who resembled her so closely in type that Audrey felt certain

she could be no other than the Evangeline Standen of whom she had heard so much. With them was a slight, fair, arrogant-looking man who must be, she thought, Lord Wanford. Across the little pause that ensued she could hear his voice, dry and cynical.

"My dear Evangeline," he was saying, "life's goods are never for sale at so much as eleven pence three farthings! And even the venue of the final payment is curiously uncertain!"

To both herself and Kemp these words, uttered with a kind of sententious emphasis, seemed to convey an almost prophetic meaning. It was as if they had been addressed less to Miss Standen than to themselves.

"I didn't think we should meet again so soon," said Kemp, holding out his hand. "This is one of the houses where your brother is never seen."

"I'm afraid I ought not to have come. He doesn't know that I'm here. But Mrs. Grazebrook kindly came to fetch me—" She broke off.

"I'm very glad, Indeed, that you've come," said Kemp, with one of his rare smiles. "Mr. Tressider is, as perhaps you have discovered, a man of many prejudices, and among them we must enumerate a dislike to our hostess."

He had the situation well in hand and was far the more composed of the two.

"There are some chairs in the next room," he said, still very far from interpreting accurately the look of distress that had come into her face. "Here, it's impossibly crowded. Let's go and sit down somewhere."

Audrey was thankful to escape from the scrutiny of Mrs. Graze brook's little group. The other room was fairly empty, and Kemp led her to the far end of it. They sat down, and for a few minutes remained in silence. Then he said:

"You know your brother very little, so far. But if you stay in Millborough you will soon learn. Are you brave? I shouldn't like you to be hurt!"

"And do you think Hubert will hurt me?"

"Very much, if you oppose him and get in his way. Not at all, if you consent to become a pawn in his game."

It was perfectly true; her new knowledge of Hubert had taught her that.

"You mustn't, please, try to make me disloyal to Hubert."

Moved by a sudden impulse, Kemp laid his hand swiftly on hers. Almost immediately he took it away again. But the gesture gave her courage, and to a certain extent, consolation.

Looking round the room she suddenly saw that they were now the sole occupants of it. There had been a sudden move into the music-room to hear Bertie Grazebrook sing. His voice thrilled across the silence, melodiously, tenderly. It was full of suggestive emotion. This afternoon he sang an old song to a new setting of his own. The words, the masterpiece, perhaps, of a forlorn ill-starred genius.

> It was many and many a year ago
> In a kingdom by the sea. . .

"He composed the music himself. It's a favourite song of his," remarked Kemp.

The words trailed through the room, an enchanting wonder of sound. Kemp leaned forward, chin on hand, listening.

> But we loved with a love that was more than love
> I and my Annabel Lee,
> With a love that the wingéd seraphs of heaven
> Coveted her and me. . .

The high-pitched chatter had completely ceased. Bertie could always keep his audience silent and spell-bound. The music sounded a little uncanny. There was a subtle beauty and power in the voice.

The angels not half so happy in heaven
Went envying her and me,
Yes, that was the reason (as all men know
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud one night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee. . .

The slight pause was filled up by a ripple of sound from the piano, as of the wind flowing over the sea.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we,
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in heaven above
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee."

There was a sound of applause from the next room when the song came to an end, a clamourous appeal for an encore. And Audrey became aware that Kemp's eyes were fixed upon her, his hand rested again upon hers with a burning touch. She felt powerless to move or speak.

All thought of Hubert, of Hubert's anger, left her. She felt strangely at peace. The music had moved her a little, the words were still ringing in her head.

And neither the angels in heaven above
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Shall ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.

"Why did we only meet a fortnight ago?" Kemp asked her. "I seem to have been waiting for you . . always. . ."

"Hush . ." she said. His words had broken the spell a little. She took her hand away and rose to her feet. A mist seemed to envelop her; she felt as if in spite of all endeavour she were swaying towards him, into his arms. She put out her hand and rested it firmly on the back of a chair. Kemp rose too and watched her with a curious gravity. She was not angry with him, of that he felt certain; that his words had stirred her he was also convinced.

"Don't go away," he said, "our time is so short—and we have so much to say to each other."

"I mustn't stay with you. You say things I can't listen to." She spoke with a desperate earnestness. "Things I dare not listen to. I must go back to Mrs. Grazebrook."

"So I have offended past forgiveness?" he said.

"No,—not past forgiveness. But you make things difficult for me. Perhaps we shall not meet again—it would be better." She made a step towards the music room. But he stopped her.

"Miss Tressider, don't leave me like that. Why should we not meet again? I know in your brother's house it is impossible—but here, at Lady Ince's, even in Millborough itself. . ."

"No, no. I mustn't see you. Hubert would be against it."

"Hubert!" He uttered the word with angry scorn. "You need not pay any attention to him, surely?"

"I have to obey him. He has made that quite clear."

Without another word she slipped past him into the next room. He made no attempt to follow her, but stood there with arms folded.

"You see I have put a rival in the field," said Mrs. Grazebrook to Lord Wanford, as Kemp and Audrey disappeared together. Her eyes followed the two figures as they left the room. Her little plot had succeeded admirably, and Evangeline had disappeared in anger.

"I'm very sorry, though, that you picked out that little girl," said Lord Wanford, "she looks such a nice little thing, and she's very pretty. She really oughtn't to know that kind of man."

The idea that Gertrude had fetched her on purpose to detach Kemp from Evangeline was distasteful to him.

"Oh, Hubert will take good care that she doesn't burn her fingers! And Kemp can be a very agreeable companion. He's going to recite soon some of his own poems, I believe."

It was not long before Audrey re-appeared alone, and even Mrs. Grazebrook was startled at the change that seemed to have come over her. She looked pale, spent, and exhausted, as if she had passed through a highly emotional time. But that was absurd, of course, she and Kemp hardly knew each other. It must be the unusual heat of the room that was affecting her.

Audrey sat down in a chair near the door. As she sat there she was hidden from Mrs. Grazebrook's astute gaze. It seemed to her as if she had spent all her strength in that one, fierce struggle to quit Kemp, and to quit him, too, without revealing anything of what was in her heart. The pain and shame of her position stabbed her like a knife. *"I have been waiting for you always—always. . ."* Yes, he had dared to utter those words to her, this man whom Hubert and countless others had dubbed the "gutter-genius." And instead of being angry, she had felt a strange joy that almost brought the

tears to her eyes, a strange desire to tell him that it was through no wish of hers that they were not allowed to meet, a longing to hear him say again, with renewed eagerness, that he loved her. . . She was more foolish than Evangeline Standen, whose conduct in regard to Kemp had been the subject of so much critical discussion. She wondered if he had ever spoken to Evangeline as he had spoken to her. It was terrible—this thought that he had cared for Evangeline. . .

"Why did you leave Mr. Kemp like that? He looked so unhappy," said a small, rather shrill voice beside her.

Binny had approached Audrey unseen, and now fixed his queer lack-lustre eyes upon her with a kind of unwilling admiration. He stood there with his hands in his pockets.

"He looked as if he hoped you would go back," he continued, "I expect that's because you're the prettiest lady in the room. Did you quarrel with him?"

"No, we didn't quarrel, Binny. I came here because I—I wanted to hear the music better."

"But the music has stopped. You don't call that pianola music?" said Binny, with scorn.

Audrey liked children as a rule, but Binny was precocious and un-childlike. She thought his precocity disagreeable.

"I wonder he likes you," continued Binny, "for he doesn't like Mr. Tressider at all. You know that, of course, so it doesn't matter my saying it. Once I heard Mr. Kemp say: 'Tressider and I will fight this out to the bitter end!' "

"But you shouldn't repeat what people say," said Audrey.

"But he likes you—he won't fight *you* till the bitter end," said Binny, unabashed by the reproof.

"I saw him watch you as you left him just now. Are you angry with him?"

"Binny, you are an absurd little boy! Do you always make up silly stories like that about people who come here?" Audrey spoke sharply.

"You won't put me off like that," observed Binny tranquilly, "I'm accustomed to watch people, especially when they interest me. Mr. Kemp always interests me. And I can always find out a lot just by watching people. You see, hardly anyone ever talks to me. But mamma likes me to come down. I have a half-holiday when there's a party. I hate having to wear these clothes though." He glanced down somewhat ruefully at his picture-suit of blue velvet, the lace collar, the silk socks and buckled shoes. "They'd be right enough for a pink-faced little English boy with yellow hair. I know I look hideous in them, and I can't understand why mamma doesn't see it."

"How old are you, Binny?" inquired Audrey. She began to feel a certain compassion for him; he was such a solitary-looking little being, and was painfully conscious, too, of his physical short-comings.

"Nine," said Binny, "I'm almost grown up. I have a motor-bike now and I've begun to hunt. Next year I shall go to school. I shall like that. Here, I hardly ever see any boys, and they laugh at my hair, those that I do see." He ruffled his shiny black curls with a small brown hand. He came a little closer to Audrey. "I like you," he said suddenly, "you're pretty and I like your dress, and you don't tell me to go away and not be a bother. I hope you'll come here often."

"That's very nice of you, Binny," said Audrey kindly.

"Only, perhaps, Mr. Tressider won't let you?" he inquired solemnly.

Audrey laughed. "Perhaps you'll be allowed to come and see me, Binny."

"Oh, I should love that. It would be simply ripping," said the boy eagerly.

Audrey exerted herself to talk to him. She began to tell him about Ninian's long voyage, and of the strange lands to which he was going, and of the wild, wonderful beasts and birds he would probably encounter. Binny listened intently and then clapped his hands.

"I wish I could go, too!" he cried excitedly.

"Perhaps you will when you're a man," said Audrey.

There was a little stir at the other end of the room, and she saw Kemp's tall form emerge from the crowd and mount upon the raised platform that had been arranged for the performers.

"He's going to recite," whispered Binny, "but he won't do it well if he thinks you are angry with him."

"He won't think anything about it," said Audrey. "And I shall be cross and tell you to go away if you don't stop making up stories about people."

Her eyes were fastened upon Kemp, who stood there now facing the audience. There was a hush in the room. On one or two faces Audrey believed that she could discern an iron contempt for the "gutter-genius." On others there was a kind of languid interest, and yet again on others a hint of bored incredulity.

With his face almost lividly pale, his black hair, his deep-set flaming eyes, Kemp looked like a prophet,—a prophet not of harmonious, suave and beautiful things, but a prophet who foretold the reaping of the whirlwind. . . .

He recited a couple of his own poems, poems of the East End, perhaps of his own boyhood. His voice had a beautiful natural timbre that made it an

agreeable one to listen to. But to Audrey, listening with beating heart, it was almost terrible. She understood for the first time, perhaps, the dreadful reality of his power, the power that sought to hold and sway her. Something in him repelled her even while it fascinated her. He ravaged every preconception she had ever formed of the man she should one day love . . . Love? The word came into her mind with all the force of a scourge. Her face crimsoned. To love him she must stoop. To love him she must turn away from her own secure little world. There would be no place in it for her any more. It would cast her out, as one who had, in a sense, betrayed it. She felt pain, shame, humiliation, at the thought that this man could so strangely move her, but through it all there flashed a great joy that he was not indifferent, that he loved her. . . .

"He speaks not quite like other people," pronounced Binny, at the conclusion of the first poem. "But I like to hear him—he gives me shivers all down my back."

Audrey did not answer. Her face was curiously frozen. Her hands lay in her lap, clasped tightly together. All around her, people were clapping and applauding. She wondered idly why they liked it; to her it was tragic, a thing of tears. She began to understand his power to hold his audience, to mould them, to bring them round to his own way of thinking. What chance could Hubert have against such a man as that, if they were ever rivals for public favour? . . .

At the end of the recitation Binny clapped his hands wildly and shrieked at the top of his voice:

"Bravo! Bravo! Encore! Encore!

A short, angry-looking man hurried across the room.

"If I hear you shriek again like that, Binny, you shall go straight up to bed. You've got no business to be here at all!"

"Mamma likes me to be here," said the boy, in a tone of sulky defiance.

"Don't answer me or you'll get your ears boxed!" said Vandom angrily, as he walked away.

"That's my father," Binny informed Audrey. "He doesn't care for this kind of thing—it always makes him cross! And he hates Mr. Kemp—I heard him tell mamma that she wasn't to encourage him to recite. But I liked it, didn't you?"

"Yes, I liked it, Binny," said Audrey.

Mrs. Grazebrook trailed gracefully across the room towards her.

"We ought to be starting now. I'm taking both you and Mr. Kemp back to Millborough, and he said he must positively leave directly he had done reciting."

Audrey checked an impulse to oppose such an arrangement. But she had no other means of getting home, and already it was late. She thought to herself: "I ought never to have come. Hubert will be angry." She rose and followed Mrs. Grazebrook across the room to the place where Mrs. Vandom was standing.

Sonya was flushed and excited; the colour in her cheeks deepened to a dull purple. Her laughter sounded shrill and loud.

"Must you really be going? It was delightful having you, Miss Tressider. I knew you'd met Mr. Kemp at Lady Ince's, so I saw that you meant to take a line of your own down here. You know we're all divided into the sheep who won't receive him and the goats who do. It's charming to think you're one of the goats!" Her laughter grated on Audrey's ears. She had no reply to make. If she

had contrived to place herself in a false position it was wholly her own doing.

"Do not be too sure that the Great Bear won't turn into a sheep!" said Gertrude Grazebrook, in a lazy, half insolent voice. "I expect after this, he will shut her up till she promises to be a good little girl."

"I shall come and let her out if he does!" interposed Binny, valiantly.

Sonya screamed with laughter, as she always did at Binny's speeches.

"That's right, Binny. You'd make a perfect little knight!" She threw her arm round the boy's neck and, dragging him close to her, kissed his mop of curls. Binny emerged, reddened, from the embrace.

"Well, come along, or we shall be late," said Mrs. Grazebrook. "No, Evangeline, there's positively no room for you. Besides, you must go back with Toby. Bertie's got the other car."

Evangeline had come up to join her sister, and now stood looking at Audrey with a somewhat disconcerting scrutiny.

"Oh, I forgot you hadn't met. Evangeline, this is Miss Tressider who has had the courage to go and live at Millborough Hall, and to keep house for the Great Bear."

Evangeline held out her hand. Audrey thought her more beautiful and even more strange-looking than her sister.

"But I am sure you find life in Millborough delightful," she said in a slow, deep voice. "One lives there. One doesn't stagnate. Things *happen*. . . ."

"Do they?" said Audrey, with almost unconscious irony. "You see, I stay a great deal in the house. I hardly ever go into Millborough."

"That's a mistake," said Evangeline, "you would learn a great deal by going there. You might even join us."

"Join you?" Audrey looked perplexed.

"Mr. Kemp is always looking out for likely recruits to help him in his work," said Evangeline. "I wonder he hasn't tried to rope you in. Mr. Tressider's sister would be very useful for purposes of propaganda."

She spoke with an almost sinister emphasis. Almost as if she wished Audrey to believe that all Kemp's attentions signified nothing but an attempt, plausible, unscrupulous, to win her over to his side. He had pretended to love her, had even made love to her, as far as he dared, had tried to win some response from her. And all the time he had wanted to gain her as a recruit for his cause. She controlled herself with an effort. She did not want Evangeline to know how greatly her words had hurt her. They put Kemp's recent conduct into a new and sinister light. He had been playing a part, and she had lent herself to it, a willing victim. The thought shamed her. She longed to go away. Wanford and Gertrude were standing there listening to the conversation, of which not a word was lost upon Mrs. Vandom and Binny. Why had they brought her here? Were they all in league with Kemp? . . .

"Come!" said Mrs. Grazebrook. She was feeling vaguely sorry for Audrey; she had a conviction that Evangeline's words were disturbing her. And she did not wish any misunderstanding to arise between Kemp and Audrey. Evangeline had a serious rival in the field, and naturally she was on the defensive. She would strike a blow to keep Kemp. Audrey, unaware of the intrigue, could only think that gossip had already been busy with her name and Kemp's. It almost seemed as if his very words to her had become known. She turned away and followed Mrs. Grazebrook out of the room.

The motor was waiting for them outside. Mrs. Grazebrook got up in front and sat down in the chauffeur's place.

"Yes, I'm going to drive. Don't be alarmed! You two can sit inside."

Kemp helped Audrey into the motor. For a moment he stood hesitatingly on the pathway.

"Perhaps I'd better get some one else to give me a lift. It'll be awfully out of your way going into Millborough."

"Nonsense! Get in," said Mrs. Grazebrook.

Kemp obeyed. He was sitting near Audrey in the darkness of the motor. At first he did not speak. She was angry, perhaps—she did not like him to be there. He had submitted to the superior force of Mrs. Grazebrook's will; it had happened, too, to coincide with his own inclinations. They sped through the darkness, Gertrude driving at reckless speed.

Kemp bent his brows and looked at Audrey.

"Still angry with me?" he said at last.

"No, I am only angry with myself."

"But why?"

"For coming to-day. It was a great mistake." Her mind was concentrated upon the thought that she was the victim of an intrigue. Whether Kemp had anything actually to do with it, she could not be sure. She was not sure of anything. She had the feeling that she stood insecurely upon unstable ground.

Kemp pulled down the window at his side, and leaned a little towards it. The wind touched his brow with stinging force; he had the feeling that his face was being flayed with iced needles. But it revived him, and gave him courage.

"I'm sorry I have made you regret it," he said.

"You didn't make me. I've seen how wrong it was—my going against Hubert."

Yes, they had a right to say that she had taken her own line, regardless of her brother. They had seen Kemp sitting with her, talking to her, singling her out for special and particular attention. And now Mrs. Grazebrook had purposely left them together.

"You are distressed. Something has distressed you. Has anyone said anything?"

"Nothing that I can repeat," said Audrey in a muffled tone.

Kemp was mystified. He pulled the rug more closely about her, fearing that she might be cold. It was very dark, except for a few stars, burning timidly in the night sky. The car went swiftly down the long, straight road that led to Millborough.

"Miss Tressider," he said suddenly, "don't let us part like this. I'm sorry if I've said or done anything to offend you. Believe me, I wouldn't hurt you for the world."

She turned to him suddenly.

"Oh, why don't you go away? Why don't you leave Millborough? Why must you persecute Hubert? Don't you see how impossible it all is?"

His face hardened. Again that old ugly doubt of her crept into his heart. She was appealing to the emotional, sentimental side of him, to save her brother from attack. He said coldly:

"What you ask is impossible. I want you to see how necessary—how right—my work here is."

"You must not wish me to see that." Her voice was low and troubled. He felt, rather than saw, that she was on the brink of tears.

"But whatever I say and do, you must never doubt my love for you," he said. "Nothing can ever change that. It is yours—always yours. . . . Some

day I shall ask for yours in return, and I think you will give it to me."

She struggled against the feeling, never more strong than at that moment, that if he chose he could extort a confession of love from her.

"I shall never give it to you," she said. Her voice sounded strange to her own ears.

"Do you think Tressider is capable of keeping us apart, ultimately?" he demanded.

"He is not the only thing that is keeping us apart."

Mrs. Grazebrook stopped the car at the entrance gates of the Hall.

"I won't drive in. You don't mind getting out here, Audrey?"

Kemp opened the door and Audrey descended. In the sharp glare of the powerful lamps he could see her face, pale, controlled, almost a little hard.

"Good-night, Audrey. I hope you won't get a scolding!" Mrs. Grazebrook spoke gaily.

"Good-night," said Audrey.

She shook hands with them both and walked quickly up the drive.

CHAPTER XX

A REPRIEVE

MRS. GRAZEBROOK yielded her place to the chauffeur and got in beside Kemp.

"Well," she said lightly, "I suppose like everyone else you have fallen in love with little Miss Tresider!"

"Like everyone else? What do you mean?"

"She stayed with me last autumn, and Sir Myles Dorling was crazy about her. She is very—unresponsive. . . ."

"Is she?" he said indifferently. Yet the words had stabbed him to a new jealousy. Sir Myles Dorling! He had heard of him. A rich man—a man of her own world. . . .

"She is certainly very pretty and charming," said Gertrude.

"She is quite a slave to her brother's opinions," said Kemp, in a discontented tone.

"Yes. That's so nice of her. For, between us, I don't think he's very kind to her."

"He is not capable of kindness," said Kemp.

"I always feel that she's a little bit afraid of him."

"Very likely." His tone was perversely non-committal.

"We've all been expecting that your attacks upon him would diminish in fury."

"Why should they?"

"You might wish to please her."

"You think so lightly of my work as that?"

"I think that you would like to be friends with her."

"And so you believe I am ready to pay a high price for the privilege?"

"I am not sure." She spoke guardedly.

"I will tell you, then. I shall never cease my attacks upon Tressider till he lies defeated in the dust. I shall pay him back for every petty insult he has thrust upon me!" There was fierce anger in his voice.

"You could do that very easily."

"Easily?"

"Through his sister—through Miss Tressider. If you were to win her over—"

"She's too loyal for that. And for her sake I shall probably let him go down to hell unpunished!"

"I think you might win her. You do influence people, you know. It would be worth trying."

"I am sure you are mistaken."

The motor drew before a tall, brick house, facing a busy street cut lengthways with shining tram-lines.

"This is where you live, isn't it?" said Mrs. Grazebrook. "Your rooms must be nice and cheerful, looking on to the street. I hope they are comfortable, too—you work so hard." She held out her slim hand.

"Good-bye," he said, "and thanks for bringing me home. I'm not going to waste my time with any more parties. I must get back to steady work."

He raised his hat and then went into the house. Mrs. Grazebrook watched him disappear. Then she said "Home!" to the chauffeur and leaned back in the car. She was quite satisfied with the success of her little scheme. All the puppets had played their parts just as she had expected. Audrey had accompanied her to the Vandoms with only a slight demur, Kemp had singled her out for marked attention, which had been palpable to everyone in the room and which had even given rise to a few ironic comments. Evangeline had worked herself up to a fury of jealousy, and had not exchanged two words

with Kemp the whole afternoon. With regard to Kemp's own attitude towards Audrey, Gertrude felt less certain. She had tried to ascertain something of it, but his replies had been guarded, as if he had divined an ulterior intention. But Audrey herself—that was another matter. She had had the look this afternoon of a little, wild, snared bird. She was as one struggling for freedom, yet half loving the trap that held her. She was not indifferent to Kemp. And Kemp, for some purpose of his own, had willed that she should not be indifferent. Mrs. Grazebrook had small concern for her other puppets as long as she succeeded in achieving the rescue of her sister. A jealous Evangeline might well turn to Wanford and accept him out of pique. Mrs. Grazebrook went home that evening with the comfortable consciousness of having done her duty, and done it rather cleverly.

Audrey hurried up to the house. All the windows were, as usual, carefully shuttered, and scarcely a gleam of light protruded from any of them. She rang the bell and the door was almost immediately opened. She was late, and if Hubert had returned he would naturally wonder what had become of her. But she still clung to the hope that he had been detained late at the Works. Her nervous fear of meeting him was coupled with a consciousness of having deliberately set aside his wishes. Yes, she had taken her own line, and people had noticed it. That she and Kemp were on friendly terms was now a well-known fact. Millborough gossip would certainly acquaint Hubert with it sooner or later. Perhaps they had seen in her a possible recruit, rallying to Kemp's standard, against her own brother. She felt her cheeks flush with shame. She had gone blindly forward into the trap. . . .

As she entered the hall Hubert came out of his study.

"Where have you been to, Audrey?" he demanded.

"I've been to the Vandoms. They had a concert. Mrs. Grazebrook came to fetch me and brought me home."

"Come in here." He held open the study door. Audrey walked obediently into the room. Hubert followed her and shut the door.

"Sit down," he said peremptorily.

He was very angry, and in this mood of white-hot rage, Audrey feared him. She felt all at once young and helpless and physically cold.

"Was Kemp at the Vandoms' this afternoon?" demanded Hubert.

"Yes," said Audrey.

"You spoke to him?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Were you with him long?"

"About—a quarter of an hour."

"You were friendly in your manner to this man?"

"I was—not unfriendly."

"Did he come back with you and Mrs. Grazebrook?"

"Yes, Hubert."

"That will do. Your boxes shall be packed to-night. You shall return to London to-morrow. I shall write to Aunt Cynthia to put her on her guard."

"Oh, Hubert, don't—don't! I mean—don't send me away."

"I am certainly not going to have you here." Hubert went over to the table.

"Hubert—there is nothing to make a fuss about. You are exaggerating—" She stopped short.

"Am I?" he said.

She turned her face from him; his steady, merciless gaze unnerved her.

"You can honestly tell me that this man has said nothing to you which you would mind my hearing?"

She did not speak. After all would it not be best to go away, before Millborough broke her heart? She rose wearily.

"Can I go, please, Hubert?"

"Yes, I have nothing else to say to you. You will leave by the ten o'clock train."

Between the two men her will power was gone. She was swayed from side to side by two adverse currents that caught her up and flung her, bruised and broken, upon the rocks. As she stood there, holding the handle of the door in an attitude of indecision, she heard a knock.

Jones entered, carrying a salver upon which lay the orange-coloured envelope of a telegram. He advanced towards Hubert.

"The boy's waiting to see if there's an answer, sir."

Hubert tore it opened and scanned its contents.

"There is no answer."

Audrey turned to leave the room.

"Audrey!" said Hubert.

She stopped short. The thought of a reprieve never entered her head. By this time the servant had withdrawn, and the brother and sister were left alone.

"Aunt Cynthia has telegraphed to say that she is going abroad unexpectedly to-morrow. You cannot go to her. Under the circumstances you must remain here until I have found some other home for you."

To send her away to some place where she would be perfectly independent and have full liberty to

do exactly as she liked, would be simply inviting disaster. Kemp would follow her. It would be far better for her to remain here, under his own eye.

Her look of intense relief did not escape Hubert.

"And while you stay here you must obey me."

"Yes, Hubert."

"You must not accept any invitations without first consulting me."

"Very well, Hubert."

"Will you promise me that you will never speak to this man again?"

His hard, pitiless eyes searched her face.

"I can't promise that. I might meet him as I did to-day. But I will try never to see him. ." Her voice trembled a little.

Moved by a sudden impulse she went up to Hubert with something of her old fearlessness.

"Hubert, don't let us quarrel. Ninian and I hardly ever quarreled. I don't really want to be friends with Mrs. Vandom or Mr. Kemp."

He was somewhat mollified.

"You must see that by your friendliness to this man you are placing both yourself and me in a false position. Either he is scheming to win you over to his side, as he has done Miss Standen and Mrs. Vandom, or he is falling in love with you. Whichever it is, no good can come of it. I don't want to be hard upon you, Audrey, but I am obliged to see that you don't make undesirable acquaintances here. When Aunt Cynthia returns to London you had better to go back to her. I see that this isn't at all the right place for you. You are young, you naturally want to go out and enjoy yourself, to meet young people of your own age, and that isn't very possible in Millborough."

"I am sorry I offended you, Hubert. I did tell Mrs. Grazebrook that I was sure you wouldn't like

me to go. But she over-persuaded me, and I was feeling rather dull and lonely when she came."

"Yes, it is dull for you here," he agreed. "You'll be better in London."

"But you mustn't think that, Hubert. I—I like being here. I don't want to go away. ." She held up her face to him, and he gave her his usual light, perfunctory kiss upon the forehead.

"You must be reasonable and obedient," he said in his authoritative way, "and then you will find things will go quite smoothly. I naturally expect to be obeyed in my own house. Now you'd better go up and take off your things. It's nearly dinner-time."

Audrey went out of the room.

The reprieve had been given, but she knew now that everything would depend upon her obeying Hubert in the future.

At dinner that night he said to her:

"I don't wish you to recognize Mr. Kemp in future when you meet him. Do you quite understand?"

Evidently he had been meditating upon the situation, and now she was to learn the decision at which he had arrived.

"You mean I mustn't even bow?"

"Exactly. You cannot know this man, and you must make it clear to him. People are beginning to talk, you know."

She flushed crimson. "What are they saying?"

"They are saying that he is trying to stab me in the back—through you."

"He isn't capable of it!" cried Audrey passionately.

"I am, perhaps, the better judge of that. It rests with you, Audrey, not to give any cause for gossip. You were not, perhaps, sufficiently on your guard,

but now you must look things in the face. I am not going to give Kemp any opportunity of making love to my sister."

She was silent. Already a subtle poison was tainting the thought of Kemp in her mind. She had been used to simple things all her life, and the very complexity of the situation harassed her. If it were really true that Kemp was pretending to love her in order to hurt Hubert more efficaciously, she felt that she must die of shame. But she could not believe it of him. There had been sincerity and earnestness in his voice and face when he had spoken to her of his love. She had not doubted him then; why should she doubt him now? Hubert hated him, and had his own motives for wishing to vilify him in her eyes. He feared Kemp's influence over her. And he was right to fear it. He had never been far from the truth. He believed that their intercourse had held something of a warmer, more tender nature than was justified by a mere chance acquaintanceship. She was afraid that Hubert might discover the truth, might learn that Kemp had not attempted to conceal his love for her. Nor did she now try to deceive herself any more. She loved him against her will. She would have married him in defiance of the whole world. Even if Hubert sent her away, she could never be utterly banished from Kemp, from Millborough. She would see him, speak to him; she could not let him go out of her life forever. But the dreadful doubts of his sincerity were less easily quelled. He might well be using her as an instrument with which to stab Hubert, as he suggested, in the back. And in that case she felt that the shame of it would kill her.

CHAPTER XXI

HOME TIES

AFTER leaving Mrs. Grazebrook, Kemp went up to his room which from the third floor looked down upon High Street at Millborough. The room was big and bare and plainly furnished, and to-night it was bitterly cold, and formed a striking contrast to the suffocating warmth of Reddell Park.

On the table he found a letter from Jane. The uneducated writing, the thin, common envelope, the blotted address, were details that had their full effect upon him this evening. Letters from the Bow Road seldom made pleasant reading. Adam waited till he had filled and lighted his pipe before he opened this one.

The letter was short and to the point. Jane's pen was not guided by a ready writer, and where the task was so difficult it was unlikely she would waste words. She simply told him that Rachel's departure for Gloucestershire had been fixed for the following Tuesday, and as she could not well leave her work, she hoped that Adam would come and make arrangements for the journey, and accompany his sister to the country. There was a short postscript which filled to the full his cup of annoyed anxiety, *"Jim is on the drink again."*

He had no wish to leave Millborough just then. The member, Mr. Smith, was now said to be slowly sinking, his death might take place at any moment. And Kemp wished to be on the spot when that event happened. Mechanically, however, he made plans for his journey. He would go up on Sunday night. That would give him a whole day in which to arrange things and also to meet a couple of delegates

from the North who were, he knew, in London. He would, of course, find time to run down to the Bow Road on Monday morning to see his sisters. And on Wednesday, after leaving Rachel in her new abode, he would return to Millborough.

He sank into a chair. The day had been an unsatisfactory one. It is true that he had seen Audrey, but she had seemed further away from him than ever. She had shown him that the very fact of her being Tressider's sister could only place an invincible barrier between them. There were moments, of course, when he believed without vanity that in default of such a barrier she might have loved him. He was aware of the disturbing effect of his presence upon her; it was as if she were struggling for liberty.

His eye fell again upon Jane's letter, lying open on the table beside him. It seemed to remind him of other barriers. The house in the Bow Road, for instance. Rachel's old home in Grigg's Court, an unsavoury nest of tumble-down hovels that ought to have been cleared away long ago. And his sisters . . Jane who worked with her hands for less than a pound a week. Those grimy, red hands, enlarged and rendered uncomely by hard, manual work. And Jim, stumbling in, the worse for drink. Those were the real barriers. It was Audrey herself who had taught him, temporarily, to forget them.

He went down to the Bow Road early on the following Monday morning. Rachel was in a nervous, agitated state, partly at the prospect of the journey and partly at the idea of being thrust into strange surroundings, away from Jane. She knew that she would miss that rough but faithful assistance, the service so punctually and readily proffered. Jane was often harsh, and often, too, reduced her sister to tears, but Rachel accepted these disadvantages without demur, she no more resented them than she

would have resented parental harshness. Jane had had charge of her when she was a little girl, and she had not forgotten the days when her sister had clothed her, fed her, scolded her, whipped her, just as if she had been her own child. She submitted therefore to those somewhat rough ministrations without a murmur. She dreaded, too, being parted from her sister. If Jane could have come with her . . . She said this to Adam with tears in her eyes.

"Now, Rachie, none of that nonsense *if* you please!" said Jane with severity. "You've just got to make up your mind to go."

"Yes, I know, Jane. But I'll be lonesome down there with no one I know. I'd rather stay here . . . even if I am to die."

"Die!" said Jane, with a snort, "who's talking of dying? You've got to get better down in that good air. Haven't we found you a nice place where there's a Catholic church and all, and a good Catholic woman to take you in?"

"Yes, I know you've done everything for me, but I wish you could come with me. And then who's to keep an eye on Jim?"

"The police'll do that," said Jane grimly.

"He'll have no one to come and see when he feels a bit low," said Rachel.

"He can come and see me whenever he likes, and he'll hear the plain truth when he does," said Jane.

Adam sat there, tapping the floor with his foot in an excess of suppressed irritation. He could imagine this altercation having been resumed at intervals ever since his last visit. Rachel, pleading and piteous, Jane, harsh and grim, and never by any gentle word or caress revealing her adoring love for her dying sister.

"And supposing I get ill—" Rachel's voice sounded querelous.

"You won't get ill," said Jane reassuringly.

"But I might. It's cold in the country."

"Cold's what you want," said Jane, eyeing that almost emaciated face.

"You'd come, wouldn't you, if I was dying?"

"Oh, I'd come then, right enough!"

Adam crossed the little room and sat down by Rachel's sofa.

"Dear Rachie," he said gently, "you musn't have such gloomy thoughts. You're going to get lots better. And I can easily run over and see you from Millborough. You know it isn't far."

"You were always a rare one for promises, Addie," said Jane, contemptuously. She had considerable scorn for any form of soft-speaking, it was to her only a disguised hypocrisy.

"But I mean it, Jane. Rachel's only got to write to me. It isn't really a long journey from Millborough."

Everything in the little house struck him to-day as looking more sordid and unclean than usual. A pungent smell of frying fish had met him as he climbed the stairs. Jane, with roughened hair and sleeves rolled up to her elbows, was engaged in preparing a stew for the mid-day meal. Its odour filled the room. She had stayed at home this morning in order to see Adam, and he knew that she would expect him to stay and partake of the meal now under preparation.

"Now tell me about Jim," he said, fondling Rachel's thin fingers in the gentle, caressing way she loved.

"Jim wasn't himself when he last came round," said Jane, before her sister could speak, "but he knew enough of what he was saying and doing to swear that he wouldn't pay a penny towards Rachie's maintenance unless she went back at once to Grigg's

Court. And he threatened to 'do her in' if she didn't go back."

"Oh, but you know he didn't mean it, Jane," said Rachel, eagerly. "He'd had too much to drink—it always makes him queer. . . ."

"Queer!" Jane threw back her head with a snort and stirred the contents of the saucepan with renewed vigour. "Queer, indeed! If I hadn't been there to direct him down the stairs he would have 'done you in,' Rachie."

"If he really threatened her," said Adam, "I think Rachel ought to get a judicial separation. I'd be willing to pay all the costs. Then he'd have to pay towards her maintenance."

"Oh no, Addie. I don't want to have the law of him!" protested Mrs. Todd.

"Well, you'll be safely out of his way in Gloucestershire," said Adam.

He knew that, in spite of her habitual softness towards her husband, she was really in terror lest he should one day appear during Jane's absence and "do her in." More than once the thought that she heard his footstep creeping up the stairs had caused her to break into a violent perspiration, and to suffer afterwards from a fit of hysterics when she discovered to her relief that she had been mistaken. The fear had grown of late, because whenever he had come round to see his wife there had been threats of violence and vengeance both against herself and Adam. It was, indeed, mainly because of her terror of him that she had consented to leave London and Jane. It had helped more than anything to reconcile her to the idea of going away. The East-Ender is not easy to transplant; he does not flourish in alien soil; in nine cases out of ten he drifts back forlornly to the scenes to which long custom has inured him.

"Yes, but I'll be anxious about him, too," said Rachel.

"Going to have dinner with us, Addie?" said Jane, a slightly ironical note imbuing even her invitation with a touch of bitterness.

Adam looked at his watch.

"No, thanks very much, Jane. I'm due back to see a man. But I'll be here at nine o'clock sharp to-morrow morning to fetch Rachel. I'll bring a taxi. . ."

"Going to do it in style?" Jane said, regarding him with a kind of cynical amusement. "A taxi, indeed. I reckon it's the first time Rachie's ever been in one of them things!"

"I shan't be nervous, shall I, Addie? You won't let the man go too fast?"

Adam laughed. "No, I promise you you won't be nervous, and you will get to Paddington ever so quickly. Jane'll have you quite ready by nine, won't you Jane?"

"You give your orders, Addie, and I'll obey them," said Jane sourly. Nothing annoyed her so much as any parade of a superior condition of life on the part of Adam. She was vexed to think he could afford to fetch Rachel in a taxi. Yet if he had suggested any cheaper means of conveying her to Paddington she would probably have rebuked him for being stingy, and for keeping his money for his own use. She was difficult, nay impossible, to please. If Adam had remained with them, had kept to a humbler walk in life, she would, perhaps, have been satisfied. But she resented the fact that, by his own ability and genius, he had risen above his early surroundings and had achieved a certain degree of prosperity; and perhaps most of all, she felt aggrieved because in manner, looks, and speech he resembled a "gentleman." His courteous speaking was in her

opinion mere humbug. That he had worked his way up, did not endear him to Jane, and she never saw him without a longing—not always suppressed—to inform him that he was "too big for his boots."

Adam drove up in a taxi a little before nine on the following morning. Meeting Todd on the pavement just as he was going into the house he curtly informed him that in all probability Rachel would try to get a judicial separation from him.

"You'll have to contribute to her maintenance then," said Adam, "and it'll be better for you than if we were to summon you for using threatening language."

Todd had been having "a night of it," with a few chosen companions. He had not returned to Grigg's Court, but had slept under an arch. He was not a pleasant person to look upon, and the effects of his recent libations had by no means worn off. But he was in the violent mood that with him always accompanied the later stages of intoxication, and instead of answering his brother-in-law he swung his fist straight at Adam's face. Kemp evaded the blow by a hair's breadth, and a policeman's timely appearance at the corner of the street had an immediately sobering effect upon Todd. He contented himself with presenting Adam with a few choice specimens from his vocabulary, and having expressed his ultimate willingness to "swing for him," beat a hasty retreat before the rapid advance of the policeman.

Adam was thankful to find that he had disappeared before Rachel came down. It was a relief to get his sister away without a scene. He had even feared that Todd would oppose her departure. They drove to Paddington without further incident. Adam walked down the long platform with his sister leaning on his arm. She had hardly sufficient strength to reach the train, and he had to encourage

her with the promise that she should lie down until she arrived at her journey's end. They made their way slowly enough, and it was during this walk that Kemp came suddenly face to face with Tressider. The two men made no attempt to recognize each other. But Hubert's glance took in the pale, thin, faded woman who clung to Kemp's arm and seemed to require all the support he could give her. A shabby, poorly-clad figure, suffering, to judge from her emaciated condition, from some incurable malady that was probably nearing its final stages. Hubert wondered idly if she were Kemp's wife. He was just the sort of man to have an unproduceable wife somewhere in the background, a woman belonging to the class from which he had sprung. But it mattered little, he had no further concern with Kemp, except as regarded his public dealings with him. After the recent scene he did not think Audrey would again transgress in the matter of speaking to him. Hubert complacently reflected that he had put his foot down to some purpose, and had made it clear to Audrey that he was master in his own house. He had travelled up with Vandom the day before from Millborough, and had discussed the man frankly with him. Vandom had agreed with him cordially, declaring he only wished he could forbid him to come to Reddell. "But I know my wife will soon get tired of him," he added hopefully, "and then we shan't see him any more. The worst of it is, my boy sees all these people, and he's always standing about and listening, and heaven knows what he picks up from them."

Hubert's insolent stare had not been lost upon Kemp. If possible, he urged Rachel more quickly forward, but her breathing came in alarming gasps that soon made him slacken speed. He began to wonder whether they were not taking her away too

late. Would she even reach the end of her journey alive? Seen thus out of doors she looked far more ill than had been apparent in the dusky little London room, with her face always carefully screened from the light. People turned to look at her. Kemp's brows were knitted in a deep frown when he realized this fact. He was glad to reach the compartment he had reserved for his sister and himself.

He arranged the pillows and rugs and insisted upon Rachel's lying down at once. He gave her a biscuit and a little brandy from a flask. Rachel was indescribably touched by these gentle ministrations. They were unlike anything she had ever known before. Jane's rough and ready methods were no doubt kindly meant, but her strong arms did not give the sure and tender support that Adam's did. Rachel could remember Adam vaguely as a small boy, like all the other small boys of his age and class, with hands and face by no means spotless, and black, untidy hair that resisted all Jane's efforts to keep it neat. That he should ever have developed into the Adam of to-day often caused her as much surprise as did Todd's later evolutions. The two men had started practically from the same rung of the ladder. Now they were as the poles apart. As she lay there, looking up at her brother with humid, adoring eyes, she suddenly stretched out two thin arms and pulled his face down to hers.

"Darling Addie," she murmured in a passion of gratitude, "how can I ever thank you enough?"

She would never have ventured thus far in the presence of Jane. She was aware of Jane's watchful jealously, of its grim signs when aroused, indicated often by an added bitterness of speech. And especially, Jane was jealous of Adam, of his power to do more for Rachel than she could ever do.

"But I'm glad to be able to thank you now," she added.

"Oh, I've not done anything, really," he said, slightly embarrassed by Rachel's unexpected little outburst, "and in any case, I wish we'd thought of this scheme sooner, and taken you out of London before the winter fogs began."

It was a relief to him when the monotonous, rhythmic motion of the train lulled Rachel to sleep. He drew the little blue curtain across the window to shield her eyes from the light. Its bluish shade gave her face rather a ghastly look, especially, now that her eyes with their enormous sunken lids were closed in sleep. She was going to die, and perhaps die very soon, and he wondered if she realized the fact. Hers had been such a futile, miserable, little life, lasting scarcely more than thirty years, of which nearly twelve had been filled to the brim with acute suffering. She had known pain and poverty and blows. Her four children had died at birth, a fact that was almost wholly due to Todd's ill-treatment of her. There seemed to be no compensation anywhere. Kemp looking at her told himself savagely that such things ought not to be allowed to be. And he would gladly have removed her long ago, only Jane had refused to permit him. She could give Rachel a home, such a home as she was accustomed to, she proudly informed him. No use for him to try and make a fine lady out of Rachel. Neither she nor Rachel held at all with that kind of thing. They weren't too proud to live where their parents had lived before them. It was not until the doctor declared that Rachel could only hope to prolong life by leaving London that Jane had at last given in and consented to her departure. The bitterest sting of all for her lay in the fact that her own meagre savings would not suffice for the heavy ex-

penses entailed. Adam's money was necessary, and he had poured it out with what seemed in Rachel's eyes a princely prodigality.

A first-class carriage all to themselves. Rugs and pillows and picture papers. . . . She wished Jane could have seen it. It was with such thoughts as these that Rachel fell asleep, holding in her hands a cheap little brown rosary which Adam could remember giving her on the day of her First Communion. It had cost him twopence, a sum which at that epoch he could ill-afford. It touched him now to think that Rachel should have kept it through all the vicissitudes of the intervening years.

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE "SETTLEMENT"

SOME weeks later, Lady Ince drove over to see Audrey. They had not met since the girl's visit to Abbot's End at Christmas. Lady Ince saw a change in Audrey. It was not so much that she had grown thinner and paler but that her whole aspect had changed. She looked as if she had been undergoing some subtle form of mental suffering.

"My dear, you don't look well. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"I think what's the matter with me is that I've not been doing anything at all," said Audrey with a smile.

"You mean, you find it dull here?"

"Not exactly dull. But I'm very much alone, and I'm leading a selfish, idle life."

"Don't you go out enough?"

"It's so difficult. Hubert doesn't care for the people about here. He made quite a fuss because I went to a party at the Vandoms'. He hates my meeting—Mr. Kemp. ." She pronounced his name with an effort.

"Yes. I'm afraid I made a great mistake in letting you meet him at my house at Christmas. Hubert gave me quite a lecture. I told him I was certain it did no harm. You're much too steady and balanced to let yourself be influenced by a man like Kemp. I hoped in fact that you would influence him. But I'm afraid from all I hear that he hasn't kept the good resolutions he made at Abbot's End. He doesn't go to Mass." Her face grew slightly anxious. "Well, we must pray for him." She looked at Audrey rather intently. "I suppose you haven't seen him again?"

"Only that one time at the Vandoms'." Audrey's voice was quite steady. "I could hardly avoid speaking to him. And Hubert was angry."

"I suppose he has a right to use his authority," said Lady Ince, "but he really mustn't keep you shut up like this."

"I don't see how we can alter things," Audrey said, a trifle despondently, "he wanted me to go back to Aunt Cynthia's, but she went abroad suddenly. I'm afraid it adds to his difficulties, my being here at all."

"I wonder if he'd let you come down and work at my little Settlement sometimes? I've got a house in Colt's Lane, and I generally go there at least once a week. Lately I've been going rather oftener. We've been very busy. I have an excellent superintendent now, a Mrs. Bryant. I'm sure you would like her. Why don't you come down and try it, Audrey?"

Audrey's face brightened; she momentarily lost her look of languor.

"Oh, I should love it!" she cried. Then her face fell again and resumed its old, despondent lines. "But I must ask Hubert, of course. He might object. . ."

"But why should he object? He must wish you to have some occupation."

"I don't think he ever thinks about it."

"There are a great many poor Catholics in the parish where we work," said Lady Ince; "you know it's Father Blake's parish. We've only been there since Christmas. But he spoke to me about it then —he was very anxious I should start something of the kind. It's early days to judge but I think it's going to be a success. We have a most flourishing soup-kitchen for the school-children."

"I do hope Hubert will let me come. Couldn't—couldn't you write to him?"

"*Of course,* I'll write to him." Lady Ince's voice was brisk and cheerful.

"I think it is because he isn't a Catholic that makes him so different from Ninian," said Audrey.

"Well, you must try to please him," said Lady Ince in a maternal way. "After all, he's a great deal older than you, and in a sense I think he's quite right about not letting you see much of Mr. Kemp. Hubert's in a difficult position here. By the way, we've lots of his 'hands' in our parish. Some are Irish and some come from Lancashire. There's a great deal of piety and a great deal of carelessness among them."

"Well, I'll speak to him about it this evening. You're sure that I could help—that I could be useful?" She looked wistfully at Lady Ince.

"Yes, I'm quite sure you could. You see we are all steady, middle-aged or elderly people there, and I feel we want someone young to help us."

Soon afterwards she departed, for, as she explained, she had to go down to Millborough that afternoon for a committee-meeting. The Settlement was like a new toy to her, and she was full of zeal in regard to it. The possession of it had indeed made a considerable alteration in her mode of life, which hitherto had been much less active than contemplative.

Six weeks had now passed since Audrey had last met Kemp at Reddell Park, and during that time she had not heard a single word of him. She had done her best to banish him from her thoughts, but it had not been an altogether easy task. In many ways he had made an ineffaceable impression upon her. But her memories of him were by no means very happy ones, and seen from this distance

there was even a little element of shame mixed up with them, even with the knowledge that he loved her—that he had told her of his love. . . . Because he was Adam Kemp—the "gutter-genius" she must put away all thought and remembrance of his love from her heart.

Hubert had indeed only once mentioned him, and that was shortly after the episode at Reddell Park. It was to tell her he had seen him at Paddington station, with a poor woman, obviously very ill, hanging on his arm.

"Probably his wife," Hubert had added. "Just the sort of person he might have married ten years ago before he began to imagine he was a gentleman."

Audrey had listened without comment. She had not told Hubert that the woman was probably Kemp's sister, Mrs. Todd. He had spoken of Rachel to her, and of the necessity of moving her away from London into the country. But Audrey thought it unwise to reveal to her brother that Kemp had told her so much of his own family. Hubert would divine at once the intimate character of their conversation.

"I always felt certain that he must have a wife of his own class hidden away somewhere," Hubert had continued, "or he would certainly have got that silly little Evangeline Standen to marry him last year."

And she had not said a word. If Hubert had tried to make her speak he had not succeeded. . .

She approached him on the subject of the Settlement that night at dinner.

He had already learned of its existence and had regarded it as a harmless pastime for idle women. It had also gratified him to learn that Kemp never went there. No doubt Lady Ince and her workers

did not wish to associate themselves with his violent views.

"My dear Audrey, you can't persuade me you're pining to do good works," said Hubert, bland and satirical.

"Not exactly pining. I don't suppose I should ever have thought of it if Lady Ince hadn't suggested it. But I *am* pining for occupation of some kind, Hubert. I'm just wasting my time."

"Aunt Cynthia is coming home in April. You might surely have held on for another six weeks."

He always took it for granted that when Mrs. Corby returned, Audrey would immediately leave Millborough for London. After these months spent in quiet retirement she would surely return to the gaieties of a London season with new zest.

"I hope you will have lots of going out when you get back to London. It's time you thought seriously of marriage."

"I don't want to think about—marriage."

"You must let me say that that's all nonsense, Audrey. Aunt Cynthia will see that you meet the right people, and that you marry a suitable person. I can place you safely in her hands. She is a sentimentalist, I know, but she is a very worldly one!"

"But Hubert, you'll let me help Lady Ince, won't you? She seems so anxious for me to go."

"I'm rather afraid of your coming across Kemp. He's always prowling about the workmen's homes." Hubert's face grew suddenly cold and sardonic. "And I've taken a lot of trouble to keep you out of his way."

"It was unnecessary," said Audrey, coldly. "And I don't think I'm likely to come across him down there."

"I'm not sure that I shall let you run the risk. I must think it over. I'll give you an answer to-morrow."

In the morning he received a prettily worded note from Lady Ince, begging him to give Audrey permission to help her in her Settlement work. But he had been thinking the matter over in his study during those hours of solitude last night before he went to bed and had already come to a decision. He had his own motive for wishing Audrey to take up the work in moderation. Audrey, pretty and charming, would go among these poor people, and by the time the elections took place she would have already perhaps made friends with many of them. She would be a useful asset in his political campaign. She would counteract in some measure the growing influence of Kemp, would show the world too that she herself was free from its poison.

Audrey came in from Mass that morning, her face flushed from the cold air. Plainly dressed as she was she looked distinguished, she had the indefinable look of race which is perhaps more attractive than actual beauty. Yet she was beautiful, too, and he could not blind himself to the fact.

"I've written to Lady Ince," he remarked, looking up from the perusal of his morning paper. "I've told her that you may go down and help her if she promises to keep an eye on your philanthropic performances."

Audrey beamed. She had made up her mind that Hubert would certainly refuse.

"Oh, thank you, Hubert! I do so want to help."

"I am no advocate for promiscuous charity," he observed. "So often a man's poverty is due to his own want of thrift."

"Yes, but we can't let these poor babies suffer."

"Don't try to be too much of a lady-bountiful," he said.

He had a knack of cooling her enthusiasms with his light, sardonic speech. Audrey was growing accustomed to it, had ceased to writhe under its appli-

cation. And in any case, the required permission had been given. She believed it to be the result of Lady Ince's letter.

The house which had been rented by Lady Ince was in one of the poorest parts of Millborough. It had a tiny square of so-called garden in front of it where a few smoke-blackened, decayed-looking bushes maintained a pathetic struggle for existence. There was a brass plate on the door with *Catholic Ladies' Settlement* engraved upon it in black letters.

Audrey felt a little shy when, a few days later, she first presented herself at the house. It was still early, and the Superintendent, Mrs. Bryant, received her in the small community-room. It was furnished in a simple, almost conventual manner. A few pious pictures adorned the distempered walls. A shelf contained about fifty books, all by Catholic authors. Before a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes —under whose protection Lady Ince had placed her Settlement—a blue lamp flickered.

Mrs. Bryant was a busy, practical-looking woman of about fifty. She had grey hair, grey eyes, and a sallow skin that was much weather-beaten. She was good-looking, animated, even vivacious, and had an immense fund of energy.

"Lady Ince will be coming in later," she observed, after the first greetings had been exchanged. "She is to lunch with us to-day. She tells me you would like to do some visiting, Miss Tressider. I wish you could have come down sometimes at night to help us with the Girls' Club. There's so much to do, what with the Savings' Bank, the Summer Holiday Fund, and the various classes. You couldn't manage it, I suppose?"

"I should love it, but I'm afraid my brother wouldn't hear of it. It's rather a long way to go back at night—I should have to have the car."

"Well, you might sleep here once in a while if he'll let you do that," said Mrs. Bryant, who knew Millborough pretty thoroughly, and although she had no personal acquaintance with Hubert, was perfectly aware of the kind of man Audrey had to deal with.

"I think perhaps he might let me do that," said Audrey.

"Anyhow, the visiting will be an immense help," said Mrs. Bryant, in her bright, energetic way. "We are very busy just now. You might begin with Green Row. I'll give you a list of the Catholic families We are very keen about the children. The soup-kitchen opens at twelve—perhaps you could manage to be back by then. We give the infants milk —they need it, poor little things. We have it in that big hall near the Catholic school—you go down the steps."

She took up a type-written list which had evidently been carefully prepared, and scanned it for a moment before giving it to Audrey.

"You'll find the names and numbers here, and just a few particulars to guide you. The Davys at Number 8 are very nice people. He's in your brother's Works. She's a delicate woman, lost one baby, and the new one is only a few weeks old. They haven't been married quite two years, and she isn't twenty-one."

"Hardly older than I am," was Audrey's thought. But she did not utter it, and after a pause, Mrs. Bryant continued to enumerate the denizens of Green Row, showing always a detailed knowledge of the various people and their circumstances. "The Flynns at Number 4 are careless Catholics—they hardly ever come to Mass. She says she is too busy. I wish you could do something with her, Miss Tressider. And, oh, by the way, we have one very strict

rule here. When it's a question of fetching a priest to give the Last Sacraments to the dying, Lady Ince says that neither trouble nor expense are to be spared. You quite understand?"

She looked at Audrey with kindly approval.

"Oh yes, I quite understand."

"They like a young face," said Mrs. Bryant, encouragingly. "And you are not afraid of realities, I'm sure?"

Gossip had dealt not always kindly in Millborough with Tressider's young sister. Hadn't she, it was openly said, shown a disposition to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds? She had been seen talking to Adam Kemp with apparent friendliness on more than one occasion. And if this had been done with Hubert's knowledge there must have been a definite motive for such amiability.

"No, I don't think I'm afraid of realities," said Audrey, smiling She took the paper from Mrs. Bryant's hand and then said quietly:

"I suppose you've lived here a long time? You know the people so well."

"I'm a Millborough woman and have lived here all my life," said Mrs. Bryant. "My father was a clergyman, and I became a convert after his death. So you see I've lived among them and worked among them. My husband was a doctor here. He was a Catholic born—we had only been married three years when he died. There—I have told you all the most salient facts of my life." Her manner was quite matter-of-fact and untouched by sadness. She related these events rather as if they had happened to another person. But the little recital nevertheless touched Audrey. How strange to reach the time when you looked back upon everything that mattered, knowing that it had happened irrevocably, instead of being able to look forward and wonder

what the book of fate held for you! Conversion—marriage—widowhood, and then the long years of life alone. . . .

"Now I think you'd better start out if you want to be back in time for the soup-kitchen!" said Mrs. Bryant briskly.

She watched her from the window as she went down the street in the direction of Green Row.

"That's a very nice girl and a very pretty girl," she said to herself. "I hope she won't make a mess of things. She looks the sort that might. And if it's true that she's acting as intermediary between her brother and Kemp she most certainly will!"

She had felt attracted by Audrey's charming face and simple manner. At first, she had not seconded with any warmth the proposal of Lady Ince that Miss Tressider should come down and help them. She had feared that the girl might bring with her a political element, and Mrs. Bryant did not at all share Lady Ince's admiration for Hubert Tressider. She thought him a cold and hard man, upright it is true, incapable of dishonourable action, but incapable, too, of mercy.

But now that she had seen Audrey she pitied her. . .

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. DAVY

MRS. DAVY, a fragile, loquacious woman, looking older than her twenty-one years, took up the lion's share of Audrey's first morning. Her family history, a sufficiently sad one, was related in considerable detail. Audrey was told of the first baby's death, and of the delicacy of the present one, who now lay tranquilly asleep in its cot. She herself had been less than eighteen at the time of her marriage and her husband was only a couple of years older. "But I was an orphan—we'd nothing, so to speak, to wait for. I'd tried being in service, but wasn't strong enough. Yes, Alf works in Mr. Tressider's factory. Them chemicals don't seem to suit him too well. He's got a vatman's job now. Them acids do burn his clothes and boots—I stitch and stitch half the night—but they go all rotten-like. And he's been twice in 'orspital these last six months. Burns on the hands once, miss, they've never properly healed. I often wish me and Alf had been brought up in the country, but we ain't either of us used to the life, miss, and he could never get a job on a farm. But I mustn't complain, miss, and as long as he keeps his health we can manage fairly. It's when he's in 'orspital I find it a job to manage. And I don't really know what we should have done last time with baby coming and all, if it hadn't been for Mr. Kemp.

"Mr. Kemp?" repeated Audrey. "Why, what did he do?"

"He fairly kept me and baby when I come out of the infirmary after she was born. Mr. Kemp's very generous, miss, and often they tell me he goes without a fire to have more to give away."

"Does he visit about here, too?" asked Audrey.

"Yes, he was round yesterday to inquire after Alf," said the woman unsuspectingly. "People here say he'll be in Parliament when Mr. Smith dies. He's always talking of the things he'll be able to do for us then.

Audrey started, and the colour suddenly mounted to her face. Yes, he was working the constituency. Was he serving any private motive of ambition beneath all that exterior altruism? In any case, he was working against Hubert. Slowly he was undermining his prestige in the town.

Audrey came less as Hubert's sister than as a Catholic worker from the Settlement. Yet how would these people regard her? Would they think that she came to work against Kemp, to fight against him, in the long, slow struggle that divided Millborough into fierce factions? And was it true that she was working against Kemp? She gazed at Mrs. Davy with a curious, puzzled expression.

"I've seen you in church, miss," continued the woman. "I can almost always get to Mass on Sunday morning. I used to attend the Children of Mary meetings regular before I was married, but now what with the babies coming and a husband to look after, I don't seem to get the time."

She seemed to Audrey curiously mature, as if she had definitely left all youth behind her. Her outlook was that of a much older woman who had had a deep, if narrow, experience of life. When the baby began to cry she lifted her from the cradle and rocked her in her arms, crooning softly to quiet her.

"She's a little beauty, ain't she, miss?" she said, proffering the baby for Audrey's inspection. "My little Alf was never bonny like this."

Audrey duly admired the baby, who looked a fairly healthy specimen, and had nice, blue eyes and

a little down of flaxen-coloured hair upon its head. She touched the tiny, crumpled-up hand.

"What is her name?"

"Mary, miss. I'm Mary myself, and we both like the name. She's been laid on Our Lady's altar in the church here, and I'm going to keep her in blue and white till she's six. I'm saving up to get the blue ribbons, but what with one thing and another I haven't been able to get them yet."

"Oh, I'll bring you some if you'll let me!" said Audrey eagerly. "I should so like to give your baby some."

"Thank you kindly, miss."

The woman's pale face lighted up. When she smiled, some trace of girlish comeliness was still visible in her face.

Audrey returned to the Settlement in time to help with the soup-kitchen. In the great subterranean hall, lit by flares of yellow gas, about a hundred children had assembled. Some nuns were busy stirring the contents of the great cauldrons, from which an appetizing odour went forth. Audrey helped to fill the large, tin mugs with the hot soup and carried them round on trays. Another girl followed her carrying a tray of bread, the big slices being eagerly seized upon by the hungry girls and boys. For half an hour Audrey worked hard, forgetting everything but the task in hand. Sometimes second helps were called for, and extra pieces of bread were required by the poorer children. Towards the end Mrs. Bryant looked in. She went round the benches that were arranged in a semi-circle, and had a word of kindly greeting for most of the children, in many cases addressing them by name. Her cheery presence seemed to magnetize them, and talking and laughter became general.

When the meal was over and the children had dispersed to the play-ground, Mrs. Bryant turned to Audrey.

"We'd better be going back to lunch ourselves. You must be dying of exhaustion after your long, arduous morning."

"I'm not at all exhausted, thank you," said Audrey, "I find it all very interesting, and I enjoyed seeing the children."

"So you're fond of children?"

"I've never had much to do with them, but yes, I'm sure I love them. Mrs. Davy looked so different, so happy, when she held her baby in her arms."

"Most women do," said Mrs. Bryant, with a touch of dryness.

Lady Ince had already arrived when Mrs. Bryant and Audrey returned to Colt's Lane. She greeted Audrey affectionately.

"I'm so glad Hubert was such a dear as to let you come!"

"Yes. He took one night to consider the matter," said Audrey, smiling.

"I was afraid he'd make all sorts of objections. Are we really the only ones to lunch to-day? Miss Jelf has had to go home? Well, that makes it all the nicer. Audrey can tell us all she's been doing. It's splendid having a young, keen worker." Lady Ince took her place at the table and gazed at Audrey with an almost maternal affection.

"The soup-kitchen was very crowded to-day," said Mrs. Bryant, "we had a hundred and thirteen children and forty infants. However, they are all looking much better for the regular food."

"This has been a bad winter," said Lady Ince turning to Audrey, "and Father Blake told me we must really do something for the children. That fortnight's strike in January hit many of the people

very hard. Father Blake warned Mr. Kemp that it would, but he refused to listen. He is very obstinate, you know, when he once gets an idea into his head."

Audrey learned by such odd scraps of information, something of the extent of Kemp's power in Millborough. He was a born leader, she had not been slow to realize that, but perhaps she had not quite grasped the fact that he loved to use that power, and to know that he could sway and govern large groups of men. The paper of which he was nominally sub-editor was simply an organ for the expression of his own views. He wrote exactly what he chose for it, and the editor, a meek man, submitted to his authority in all things. But everywhere one heard his name. No man was perhaps more deeply loved in Millborough by the poor of all creeds. His personal influence dominated them, and they never questioned his wisdom.

"We should all get on much better in Millborough without Mr. Kemp," said Mrs. Bryant suddenly. "He's not really a Millborough man, although he did work here as a factory-hand when he was a lad. And it's extraordinary the way the people listen to him. Now if they listened like that to Father Blake there'd be some sense in it."

"I suppose Mr. Kemp never comes here?" questioned Audrey.

"And never shall while I'm in command," replied Mrs. Bryant, before Lady Ince could say feebly, "Oh, my dear—I assured Hubert that he'd never yet set foot in the house!"

"He's nothing but a fire-eater," said Mrs. Bryant. "It's a pity he ever came. I don't say that lots of things here don't want reforming, because they do. But you don't get reforms by fanning hatred between employers and their men. You destroy, then, instead of building. The place has been in a ferment all this past year."

"Now tell me about Mrs. Davy," said Lady Ince, "I haven't seen her for some weeks. Is she pretty well again?"

"Yes," said Audrey, "but I think she must have a hard life, and she's only very little older than I am."

"When girls of that class marry young they must expect a hard life," observed Mrs. Bryant. "And I think they know pretty well what's in store for them."

"Davy works as a vatman," said Lady Ince, "I always think it must be very trying." She did not possess the forcible vocabulary of Mrs. Bryant nor did she dare look grim realities quite so steadily in the face. It was her habit to look on the bright side of things, and if one did not exist, at least to try to discover the side that was less gloomy than the others. But when Mrs. Bryant was there she found it increasingly difficult to delude herself upon any matter.

Audrey had no clear idea what constituted being a vatman. Hubert had promptly vetoed her timid suggestion, made soon after her arrival, that she should visit the factory. She had not dared propose it a second time. But now her curiosity was aroused, and she longed to know more of the exact conditions under which Hubert's men worked. She begged Lady Ince to give her some explanation.

"It's horrid work I believe," continued Lady Ince. "The vats leak sometimes, and then the vitriol or caustic or whatever it is, splashes the workers and ruins their clothes."

"And their hands and their eyes," said Mrs. Bryant.

"Is it all such dangerous work?" Audrey's face had turned quite pale. What was that Mrs. Davy had said about her husband having been in the hospital twice during the last six months, with burns that had not yet healed?

"Most of it," replied Mrs. Bryant.

"But they get paid . . . well paid?" Her voice trembled a little.

"Paid, but not too well," replied Mrs. Bryant, in a very dry tone.

"And it's necessary? Someone has to do it?"

"Yes, my dear. It's necessary and someone has to do it. Let us hope it is made as safe as possible for them." Mrs. Bryant smiled quite brightly at Audrey. She noticed and approved the girl's sensitiveness, her evident desire to know more about the conditions that prevailed in Millborough. But she wanted her also to learn to face the truth with courage.

The thought of Hubert's wealth suddenly sickened Audrey. She thought of the food at the Hall, elaborate, even expensive. When Hubert came in tired he often had half a pint of champagne. There was frequently hot-house fruit on the dinner-table. He kept both horses and motors. About his money affairs she knew little, except that he held many shares in the company of which he was managing director. And Kemp had once called the workers his "slaves." She remembered this now, and the memory brought a flush to her face as if there were shame in it. But since the last strike which had produced so much bitter distress in Millborough, the men had been better paid. Mrs. Davy's pale, patient, sickly face rose up before her. "It do burn his clothes and boots, miss, and I stitch and stitch half the night but they go all rotten-like."

But perhaps it wasn't really so bad. Perhaps it was only because she was so unaccustomed to visiting among the poor. Perhaps Hubert really did all he could. . . . She clung to this hope as to a spar amid wreckage.

"You must talk to Father Blake about it," said Mrs. Bryant kindly, "he has lived here for many years and he knows Millborough in and out, and you'll find his conclusions wiser than Mr. Kemp's."

"Shall I go back and pay some more visits this afternoon?" asked Audrey.

She was almost relieved when Mrs. Bryant said:

"No, I think you've done quite enough for one day. You mustn't overwork, especially at first."

The girl was sensitive and impressionable. She must be made to proceed with caution.

Lady Ince agreed. "Yes, you mustn't overwork yourself. Hubert would never forgive me!"

Audrey walked back to the Hall in a mood of deep, if restless, meditation. Of course it had hurt her, perhaps more than she had anticipated. But she wasn't going to be a coward. Kemp had once urged her to remain blind. What would he think if he heard that she had begun to work at the Settlement? Would he make any effort to see her again? Would he come back into her life with his overpowering influence, and force her to see things as he saw them? Her mind was filled with these thoughts as she made her way home, past the endless railway lines that everywhere intersected the town, with their dreary vistas of loaded trucks, heaped up with chemical material of all kinds. Sometimes her way led past sluggish canals on whose surface an iridescent, malodorous slime lay like a coloured skin. Huge factory-chimneys, pouring forth fierce volumes of black smoke, rose everywhere. The houses were all begrimed with that smoke, the air was full of it. What must it be like to live here and breathe it always? And the town was full to overflowing with jaded workers, living such lives as Mrs. Davy's. The question rose once more to her mind: Did Hubert know—did Hubert realize? . . .

She did not see her brother until dinner-time. When they were seated at table he turned to her with an air of gaiety.

"Well, how did your slumming go off?"

Audrey waited for a moment, then she said:

"I liked it, but it made me rather sad, I think."

She wondered why he had ever permitted her to take up the work, and much more that he should even have exhibited a certain eagerness regarding it. Surely, he must have realized that much she would see and hear would distress her.

"Sad! Why?" inquired Hubert blandly.

"I think it must always make one sad to see suffering that comes from poverty, when—when one has everything oneself, Hubert."

"Turning Socialist?" he said, not quite so blandly.

"No. I only felt that perhaps we ought to use our wealth differently. When wealth is in our hands we are taught that it is given to us for a purpose. I know there must be property and all that. A priest explained it to me once. He told me to remember what St. Basil said: *'Why do you abound while your neighbour is a beggar, except simply in order that you may win the reward of a wise distribution, and he the crown of patience?'* Socialists don't think about that Catholic side of the question—that is why they are always against the priests and the Church. But hasn't it ever occurred to you, Hubert, that we perhaps spend more here than we need, just for our two selves?"

"There are six servants," said Hubert. "And we live according to our station in life." His face hardened a little. Neither the Catholic nor the Socialist view of wealth and poverty appealed to him in the least.

"And when there's any over? You don't spend it *all*, do you?"

"I invest what I do not require. I am a much richer man now than I was when I came into this property. I am always careful about money. No man ought to live up to his income—that is foolishness."

"But if you economized a little more you could afford to be generous too," she urged rather insistently. "Even quite poor people manage to be generous by practising little economies. And if it's in a way that really hurts them, there is all the more merit."

"My dear Audrey, you are too young to consider these problems. If you like to economize in your dress allowance pray do so. It will hurt no one but yourself. But as I have already told you, I don't at all approve of promiscuous charity."

She could tell now by his voice that the discussion had begun to annoy him. Was she fated always to disagree with him, not only about little things, but also on the great questions of life, the ones that really mattered? And was this because their standards as Catholic and Protestant were so different, or did the real difference lie deep down in their own dispositions, that were as the poles apart? . . .

"Who is working at this place besides yourself and Lady Ince?" Hubert asked presently.

"A Mrs. Bryant. She seemed nice—she has lived in Millborough all her life."

"I remember her name. She was the widow of a very poor, hard-working doctor. He worked himself to death."

"And Lady Ince was there to lunch. I helped with the soup-kitchen."

"And you visited? You are not much like the ordinary run of district-visitors!"

His eyes fell upon the soft, white dress she was wearing.

"Yes, I went to see some people in Green Row. One was a Mrs. Davy. A nice woman and very delicate with a dear little baby. Her husband is one of your vatmen—he got some burns on his hands and has been in the hospital."

Hubert frowned. "He must be a singularly careless worker. There is no reason for anyone to be burnt unless he plays the fool. If Davy doesn't take care he'll lose his job!"

Audrey felt suddenly terrified. Davy was losing health and strength in Hubert's service. Was Hubert really so hard and merciless as Kemp had alleged?

She said gently:

"Davy isn't strong. They're poor, and the work rots his clothes. His wife didn't complain, she only said she had to sit up at night, and mend them."

"Well, you must try to make friends with these people. Encourage them to be contented. And if you spend more than you can afford, you must tell me."

Again the suspicion flashed into her mind that he had some particular and secret motive for allowing her to go thus among his work people. Was it in order that she might try to diminish the influence of Kemp? But in that case Hubert could have but little real notion as to the extent of Kemp's power in Millborough. She met with evidence of it wherever she went. But to her young vision both these men were wrong. Kemp in his outlook seemed to her as mistaken as Hubert was in his. He was not working in a Catholic spirit. He hated Hubert and was bent on making others hate him. He was an agitator, opposed to all law and order. He was an extremist who sacrificed all things, even his religion, to his political mission. But at least he was not "on the make." He was an ardent altruist. Poor as he

was he was open-handed. He lived frugally in order that he might have the more to give away.

"I want them to like me," she said in answer to Hubert, "I shall try to make friends with them. And already I love the children."

CHAPTER XXIV

"HOW CAN I HELP YOU, HUBERT?"

THE work proved of great interest to Audrey. She rapidly made friends in her district; the people liked her young and sympathetic presence, and learned to look out for her coming. She was a success, and Mrs. Bryant had had several disappointments among the workers at the Settlement. They were wont to arrive full of enthusiasm but the hard prose of fact and reality too often quenched that first fine fervour. But Audrey, arriving timid and tentative, eager to learn and quite humbly seeking to be taught, was a worker worth having. Mrs. Bryant would have liked her to come and live with them, but Hubert declined to make further concessions. He was even against her sleeping there except on very special occasions. Audrey having gained her first point was unwilling to press for more favours. She came and went, gay, bright and cheerful, aware that her life was now proceeding on pleasant, useful lines. The old idleness of her days at the Hall was a thing of the past. And the work took her thoughts definitely from the constant contemplation of Kemp. She even believed that she was beginning to forget, in some sort, this man who had come so overwhelmingly, so tempestuously, into her life.

She and Mrs. Bryant were sitting early one afternoon in the community-room after lunch when an urgent message was brought for the superintendent. Mrs. Bryant rose immediately and went to the telephone, which was in the passage outside. She had said nothing of the contents of the note to Audrey who was not rendered much the wiser by hearing

the broken one-sided conversation that now took place.

"Is that Father Blake? Please go at once. Yes, Tressider's Works. You may be in time." She broke off abruptly and then returned to Audrey.

Audrey had turned suddenly white. Her apprehension had been stimulated by those few words she had happened to hear. They had seemed to her full of sinister import.

"Is it—an accident?" she asked.

Mrs. Bryant's face was not quite so composed as usual. From being constantly throughout her life with old or sick or delicate people she had almost unconsciously cultivated a certain calm and unperturbed expression, just as in her manner she was invariably bright and courageous. But at that moment her usual serenity had ever so slightly left her. It seemed to Audrey that she was controlling her expression and speech with difficulty. She looked as if she had received a shock. She must have received bad news, horrible news, to make her look like that. The girl's heart sank.

"Is it—an accident?" she repeated, and this time her voice trembled pitifully.

"Yes, my dear. And I'm going out. And, Miss Tressider, I want you to go home. Just as quickly as ever you can." There was a note of authority in her voice, but Audrey did not resent it. What she did resent was the fact that Mrs. Bryant was keeping her determinedly in the dark, as if to save her from pain.

"Oh, can't I help? I should *like* to help."

Mrs. Bryant's face hardened slightly.

"No, my dear, you can only help by obeying."

"I promised to go and see Mrs. Davy this afternoon," Audrey began. Inwardly she was rebelling against the peremptory mandate that was to banish

her from Millborough at the moment of disaster.

At the mention of Mrs. Davy, Mrs. Bryant closed her lips tightly. She looked quite hard and determined. And now when she spoke there was a little note of impatience, even of anger in her voice.

"You would not find Mrs. Davy in this afternoon," she said. "Now take my advice, Miss Tressider, and go straight home as quickly as you can."

"Won't you tell me?" said Audrey. She choked back a sob. She was frightened, and something of the assurance which had always seemed to Mrs. Bryant such an attractive part of her character had gone.

"I must really go," said Mrs. Bryant. "And don't please try to find out anything. Just go home," she repeated. "Will you promise me? You must remember that I'm the superintendent here, and while you are working with us you must obey me."

The sharp peremptory tone roused Audrey. She prepared to obey without further demur. Pride made her throw back her head a little as she went down the stairs. She was ashamed that she should have been so insistent in her entreaties to be told what had happened. She had deserved the snub that had been so swiftly administered.

Outside, the March day was wintry. A wind blew from the north, so cutting that it seemed to flay her face as if with a jagged instrument. Overhead the sky was leaden, opaque, promising snow. There was no enticement to loiter on such a day, and yet Audrey felt a strange reluctance to go home. She was in a rebellious mood. And through all her rebellion there was a sense of sickening anxiety that caused her feet to lag. Yes, something terrible had happened. They would not tell her what it was. Mrs. Bryant's controlled but stricken face assured her however that it was terrible. And it had hap-

pened at the Works—Hubert's Works. This was the thought that added a sharp sting of shame to her fears. Perhaps that was why they would not tell her. She was Tressider's sister. . . .

Her way home did not lie very near the Works, but at the nearest point she saw groups of people standing about, in earnest, and, as it seemed to her excited imagination, indignant conversation. Men and women were gathered together, perhaps discussing this latest sinister happening. When she approached them they turned to stare at her with a kind of angry insolence. She tried to believe that there had not been any intentional hostility in their look, but she did not succeed in reassuring herself. She passed two men who were talking together in loud angry tones. "Serv'un right if we burn the place down. But that wouldn't 'urt 'un—he's insured."

Audrey hurried on. She was now in an excited, nervous condition, and had difficulty in suppressing the sobs that rose to her throat and almost choked her. Here and there the groups seemed to thicken. She was aware of the temper of the crowd, which is always a thing readily felt and apprehended by the sensitive. She felt intuitively the presence of something sinister, some ugly emotion that had been called into sudden being by an untoward event, that was swaying the people in Millborough this afternoon. Mrs. Bryant had urged, nay commanded her, to go home as quickly as she could. She must have guessed, perhaps, that there would be a ferment all through the town as the news was spread from lip to lip. If there had been a cab in sight Audrey would have taken it. Yes, the people did turn and stare at her with angry, indignant eyes. It was not her fancy. It made her want to get away from Millborough as quickly as she could. Quickly . . . and

safely. Yet some instinct of pride forbade her to hasten too obviously. They must not think she was fleeing from them in fear. She turned down a side street that seemed to be clear of these hostile groups. She ran a few yards, and then she distinctly heard pursuing footsteps. Her heart beat wildly. . . . Yes, someone was coming swiftly after her. She heard the footsteps close behind her. Desperately she turned, her face as white as paper, her eyes wide and startled. She had never been so frightened in all her life. It was a hideous, degrading emotion, she hated herself for having experienced it. Then relief came—relief and a sense of security that seemed to wrap her about in wide enclosing arms.

"I am afraid I startled you, Miss Tressider. Forgive me."

Adam Kemp stood looking down at her with a half-kindly, half-contemptuous compassion in his eyes. How small and white and frail she was, this woman who had hurt him so much that he had felt at one time as if she had dealt him a mortal wound.

She could not tell whether she was glad or sorry to see him. She was only aware of a passionate sense of relief that seemed to fill her whole being. It brought the tears to her eyes, but as yet she was unable to speak.

"Where are you going? I saw you cross the square. It's hardly a day for you to be going about alone." His cool voice had a steadying effect upon her nerves.

"I'm going home. Mrs. Bryant told me to go."

"So you've heard?" said Kemp.

His dark saturnine face was very grimly set.

"I don't know what's happened. They wouldn't tell me. They only sent me home. . . ." Her lips were trembling; she looked white and shaken.

"Who are they?" said Kemp.

"Mrs. Bryant—the superintendent of Lady Ince's Settlement."

"You're working there?" he asked.

"Yes, I've been going there regularly for some weeks." She looked at him with desperate entreaty in her eyes. "Oh, won't you tell me? I'm in suspense . . . it's killing me. . . ."

"I think you'd better not ask," said Kemp, in a rough, final tone.

"I'd rather know. There's something strange and cruel about Millborough to-day. Something that frightens me. When I heard your footsteps I was terribly frightened." She made the confession with a look of shame upon her face.

"I saw you running, so I ran after you. I was afraid someone had said something to you. And you oughtn't to be alone. I'll see you home."

"Oh no, please not! It will only make Hubert angry."

"On the contrary if he has any regard for you he will be very grateful to me for going with you. As you say there is something strange and cruel about the place this afternoon."

He walked on quickly, with long, swinging strides. Audrey, shaken and overwrought as she was, could hardly keep up with him. Yet he did not attempt to slacken his speed until they had nearly reached the outskirts of the town. All that time he did not speak to her. His face was grimly set and very stern. She thought to herself: "He wants to get me out of the town as soon as possible. He is afraid of . . . something . . ." Of what? His rapid decisive movements gave no indication as to the origin of this fear. She felt like a helpless child in his hands. But she followed him obediently, submissively, with no interior rebellion such as Mrs. Bryant had evoked. Once she lagged behind a little.

Her physical force was unequal to the effort. They had reached the last of the mean streets when this happened. But Kemp turned his head and said, "Come!" Then he marched on, leaving her to stagger forward as best she could.

And he . . . after these weeks of separation and silence . . . had he at last taught himself to hate her too, because she was Tressider's sister? She had never known him so rough and authoritative as he was to-day. He had come to her help, actuated perhaps by some chivalrous sense of duty. Not because he cared for her any more.

They had reached the long, deserted-looking road that led up to the Hall. Audrey stopped at last. She was exhausted and felt that she could not go another step unless he would permit her to rest.

"I must rest for a moment. But please don't wait. I can manage quite well." Her breath came in quick, short gasps. Even the hurried walking had brought no touch of colour to her white cheeks.

"I shall not leave you till we get to the gates of your house," he said curtly. But he waited while she rested, standing there by the side of the road with the frozen, desolate fields and the bleak windy sky for background. Kemp after one glance turned his face resolutely from her. *The face of the risen sun and the face of the beloved who shall look upon?* says the Japanese proverb. He was not going to let her haunt him again, with her beautiful eyes, the matchless loveliness of her hair and brow and mouth. . . .

"Do you think you could come now?" he said, when they had waited there in silence for some minutes.

"Yes. But not so quickly, please."

Once more the nightmare journey began. Kemp marched slightly in advance of her, with what she

thought a cruel rapidity; she followed him, striving to keep pace with his long strides. She could see little of his face except a grim averted profile. He seemed to have no friendship to offer her to-day. Yes, he had learnt to hate her, perhaps as he hated Hubert. It seemed to her as if hours must have passed before they reached the high iron gates of the Hall. The house was in darkness. The shutters and curtains had been fastened across the windows. The wind whistled through the stunted trees, the laurel bushes rocked along the grimy wall.

"Won't you tell me now, please . . . about the accident?" Her face was lifted to his beseechingly.

Kemp looked down upon her. Then with his eyes still fastened upon her face he said:

"A man called Davy turned giddy and fell into one of the vats. It's more likely that the sides gave, and he slipped in in that way."

"He was drowned?" said Audrey.

"Hardly that. He was burned to death. There are unpleasant things in those vats like vitriol and caustic. Father Blake was lowered a little down the side at great risk to himself, but he couldn't get near enough. He said the prayers for the dying, and they tell me that between his screams Davy made some kind of confession."

Audrey was so white now that Kemp feared she would actually faint. He put out his arm and supported her with rough strength. She did not move, but her form quivered with the sobs she could no longer repress. The sound of her weeping pierced Kemp's heart with a sharp and agonizing pang. She seemed almost unaware of his presence although her hand clung to his supporting arm.

Then his face softened. He pulled her a little nearer to him and bent his head, so that his face was close to hers in the gathering twilight that was weaving gray webs about them.

"Oh, my dear, don't stay here any longer! Go away before Millborough breaks your heart. You can do no good."

The words aroused her from that stupor of grief; they seemed to hold a strange comfort.

"I can't go away. I must stay to help them if I can. I know Mrs. Davy. . . ."

"You can never help them," said Kemp resolutely, "they'll never learn to trust you. How can they? You're Tressider's sister, and they know that he must be sending you among them for his own ends."

"I don't understand. Why should he do that?"

"You know he means to stand for Millborough when Smith dies. And he sends you among the people to counteract his own unpopularity. Everyone knows this except yourself, and perhaps Lady Ince, who never thinks of these things."

She freed herself from him and cried out, as one hurt: "It isn't true! It isn't true!"

"Yes, it is true," said Kemp. "Miss Tressider, I am going back now but before I go I must say one thing more to you. I *urge* you to go away!" There was passion as well as entreaty in his tone. "You can do no good here, and it will only break your heart. That vat has been unsafe for some time past and Tressider knew it. It has been leaking and Davy was still lame, his foot hadn't recovered from those last burns. It was an easy thing for him to lose his footing, to slip. But the men who saw him fall say that he wasn't right up close to the edge. Well, there will be an inquest I suppose, and the twelve good men and true will bring in a verdict of accidental death, and a message of condolence will be sent to the widow. You see how it is, Miss Tressider. You can do nothing. You had far better go away, for my sake as well as for your own. You hinder me in my work. I can't forget you!" His

eyes full of a dull smouldering fire were fixed upon her face. By that look and by those words she knew that he still loved her. Amidst all the confusion of pain and misery and horror that assailed her, this knowledge brought her a comfort that held an unsurpassed sweetness.

"I must go in," she said, looking towards the house. Its dark security attracted her, as any form of shelter will attract the desolate. Kemp made no attempt to detain her.

"Good night, Miss Tressider."

She saw him hurrying swiftly down the long, bleak road, back to Millborough. Then she went slowly up to the house, feeling spent with emotion and exhaustion. She went in to her sitting-room and sat down near the fire. For the first time she realized how mortally cold she was, just as if cold hands had been laid about her heart. She was shivering, and now she drew her furs more closely about her. The tragedy of Davy's death filled all her thoughts; she felt as if the sheer horror of it would kill her. Every now and then she hid her face in her hands and gave a low, wild moan of pain. Tea was brought up to her, but she touched no food although she drank two cups of the scalding fluid hoping that it would warm her. And all the time she was trying to keep the thought from entering her mind that Hubert was in the least to blame, through carelessness or culpable negligence. She felt if she once permitted that thought to enter her mind and rest there, that it would send her mad. Kemp was quite right. She ought to go away. If she went away she might forget a little. She was doing no good in Millborough. Kemp had spoken the truth. If she stayed her heart would assuredly be broken. She would speak to Hubert, perhaps to-night, and ask him to let her go. . . .

She heard him come into the house at last. It was very late. The clock had struck half past eight some time ago. He was not often so late as this unless something important detained him at the Works. But she did not move even when she heard him come in. She was still wearing her thick coat and skirt; she was too tired, too dispirited to-night to change it before dinner. Her head ached, and her eyes still smarted from those recent tears.

Suddenly Hubert pushed open the door of her room and switched on the electric light. Its sharp glare revealed a pale Audrey with red-rimmed eyes.

"Why, Audrey, sitting in darkness?" His tone was one of annoyed astonishment. He stood there gazing at her with his piercing steel-bright eyes.

She stumbled to her feet. Now he could see her more plainly. She looked distressed, and she had clearly been crying bitterly. Why was she crying? Why could she not keep a cheerful face to greet him with when he returned home after a trying and arduous day? Why was she sitting there alone in this strangely dishevelled state?

He came a step nearer.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Audrey?"

"I was down in Millborough to-day. And I heard of Davy's death. It . . . it has upset me—unnerved me. . . ."

"Who told you?"

There was an angry ring in Hubert's voice.

"I heard that something had happened when I was at the Settlement. But Mrs. Bryant wouldn't tell me what it was. She only told me to go straight home."

"You walked home?"

"Yes. I couldn't find a cab."

"No one said anything to you?"

"No . . . but I felt that the people were angry . . . I went down a side street . . . and then I felt frightened, I began to run. And someone followed me. . . ."

"Followed you!" repeated Hubert.

"Yes. It was Mr. Kemp. He insisted upon seeing me home. I think he didn't consider it quite safe for me to be out alone to-day. He came as far as the gates with me—he said you would be grateful to him . . . for seeing me home in safety. . . ."

"In safety?" he sneered. "Where was the danger?"

"I suppose because they all know me by sight now—they know I'm . . . your sister, Hubert." Her voice trailed off into a whisper. Yes, the ugly thing was said now. She could no longer keep it unuttered between them.

They stood confronting each other. Was he ashamed that his enemy should have stepped in at that critical moment and protected her during her homeward walk? Did the heaping of these coals of fire burn him? . . .

Hubert came towards her and looked at her intently as if he were determined that she should answer him, without evasion of the truth.

"And are you ashamed of being my sister, Audrey?" he said.

His voice had a sharp sound as of metal falling upon metal.

She parried desperately:

"Won't you assure me that I've no reason for being ashamed, Hubert?"

His eyes gleamed dangerously.

"Kemp has told you that you have, then?" he demanded.

"It has nothing to do with Mr. Kemp. It was the . . . the hostility which the sight of me aroused

as I passed through the streets to-day. The hostility he rescued me from."

Hubert's face was rigid as if carved out of stone.

"Kemp has been poisoning your mind against me. There was no danger. It existed only in his own imagination."

"Hubert—there's something else. I don't want to stay here any longer. I'd rather go away . . . much rather."

"You are indeed capricious," he said, "but for the moment, as it happens, I can't spare you. You have just got to stay here and help me. You can make yourself useful if you choose, only I must insist upon your keeping out of Kemp's way. Smith is dead—he died this afternoon, and there'll be an election here in the course of the next few weeks. I shall want—help. . . ."

Audrey looked at him with dull eyes.

"How can I help you, Hubert? How could I? . . ."

Before he could recover from his astonishment she had slipped past him and gone out of the door. He heard her go into her bedroom. He could hear, too, as he listened, the grating of the key in the lock.

He did not see her again that night. But what he had never revealed to her was the intensity of his relief to find that she had returned in safety from Millborough that day. Kemp had been wise to walk back with her, and he had been half-ashamed of his own flimsy pretence that the precaution had been unnecessary. He himself had had stones flung at his motor, one had broken a window and narrowly missed his face as it whizzed past him. Yes, things had looked ugly in Millborough to-day. And now, of course, Kemp was down there, stirring the men to decisive action with one of his inflammatory

provocative speeches. And whatever might have been the measure of his own contributory negligence Kemp would most certainly exaggerate it into homicidal guilt.

But it was Audrey's inability to deny that she was ashamed of being his sister that had pierced him most of all. She *was* ashamed, so ashamed that she wished to go away and leave him. She had told him quite frankly that Kemp had followed her and walked home with her, as if now she could risk nothing by the confession. It would no longer punish her to be sent away; she was only too anxious to go. She had seen and rightly interpreted something of the spirit that had been abroad in Millborough that day, and it had humbled her to the dust. . . .

CHAPTER XXV

CANVASSING

IN the days that followed Audrey felt that Kemp's words had indeed come true. Millborough was imprisoning her, body and soul. She could not go away; Hubert refused to let her go. She was to stay in order to evince her loyalty to him in a practical manner. He had not again alluded to the discussion which had taken place between them on the night of Davy's death. But it seemed nevertheless to lie like a barrier between them. They could never feel towards each other as if it had never taken place. She had spoken a word of bitter truth to him. And it seemed now as if to punish her for that word he held her in iron grip, refusing to let her escape. She was to stay and do his will. . . .

Two days later she went down to the Settlement. Mrs. Bryant was alone, and seemed slightly astonished to see her. Her manner was very kind, brisk, and energetic, but there was a slight coldness that Audrey could not but perceive.

"Don't do any visiting just now," said Mrs. Bryant. "The place is in a turmoil before the elections, and you can't do any good. Lady Ince says we are to keep absolutely clear of politics here, and it's difficult to do that if one goes much among the poor. And it's more difficult for you than for anyone because you are the sister of one of the candidates."

"What shall I do?" asked Audrey. She did not quite know why, but Mrs. Bryant had made her feel that she was not very welcome there at the present moment.

"You can write some letters for me if you will.

And then you might come down with me to the soup-kitchen."

Audrey spent rather a dull morning writing letters. She longed to go and see Mrs. Davy, but she dared not ask permission to do so, feeling certain that Mrs. Bryant would not give it. She soon, indeed, perceived that the superintendent—whether acting independently or in accordance with advice given by Lady Ince it was impossible to tell—did not encourage her to go out into the district alone. She kept her with her always, and seemed to prefer to give her work to do indoors. It was in this way that Audrey came to learn that feeling still ran very high in Millborough against Hubert. On the day of Davy's funeral she was told to stay at home. There was no work done in Millborough that afternoon, and an immense procession followed the hearse to the cemetery, that lay on a hillside outside the town overlooking the river. It was the occasion for an immense Socialistic demonstration, although the dead man, being a devout Catholic, had never formed part of any Socialistic movement in the town. He had only come out on strike because he was forced to, deploring the idleness thus imposed upon him. Mass had been said for him at an early hour in the little church, but Audrey was not present. She had not been to Mass for several days; Hubert had forbidden her to go.

After Davy's funeral there was a lull in Millborough. Work was resumed; things went smoothly; for the moment Kemp was silent. But everyone knew this was only the calm before the mighty storm which was bound to follow when the election campaign was duly inaugurated. Bills were placarded everywhere announcing a monster meeting for the following week. The words *"Speaker—Mr. Adam Kemp,"* haunted Audrey from every

hoarding. She could not escape from those immense letters that flashed at her as she went by. And although she never saw him in those days she felt his presence almost as strongly as if he had been by her side.

Every wall and hoarding were placarded with caricatures of the two candidates, and liberal mention was made on the one hand of Adam's low birth, and on the other of Hubert's increasing wealth won at the expense of his "slaves." He was also represented as a modern Dives, indifferent to the starvation and disease that were killing Lazarus at his very door.

The Socialists in Millborough formed an ardent band of freethinkers. They had only contempt for a Church that taught there must always be the poor to be ministered to by the rich, and taught, too, the blessedness of poverty, sanctified forever by Christ Who chose to be born in a stable. They had no real respect for Adam because he was a Catholic and abstained from using their arguments in favour of an equal distribution of wealth. Nevertheless, only a very small minority of them opposed his candidature. If the constituency were to be wrested from Hubert's grasp Kemp was the only man to do it. The Labour Party would vote solid for him. And he was the one fine and convincing speaker Millborough possessed. The very fact that he was opposing his enemy, Hubert Tressider, would of a certainty lend fire to his speech. There were a number of Irish in Millborough who would certainly vote for Kemp, and besides the Irish there were numerous Lancashire Catholics who would be equally sure to give him their support. The duel was thus a purely local one, fought by two local men, each with a considerable interest in Millborough. Hubert was bound to poll the middle-class

vote. The small investors in local industries, the shop-keepers as well as the better-class residents, who preferred to be represented by a gentleman and a Unionist, would vote for him to a man. The conflict promised to be a close and hardly-fought one.

Audrey had a secret longing to hear Kemp speak. She would learn then precisely what his views were, what his policy was, whether constructive or only destructive, and something, too, of the programme he intended to set before the people for the amelioration of their lot. She wished, too, to listen to that eloquence for which he was so celebrated. If he had come forward simply as a Catholic, setting forth Catholic teaching on social subjects, she felt that he might have been a veritable prophet, warning the men against anarchical extremes on the one hand, and preaching the brotherhood of all in Christ on the other. Now he would only appear as a man of the people, their friend and the apostle of their cause, but in no sense as a Catholic.

Father Blake took no active part in political matters; his work he declared lay in other fields. But when his advice was asked he could only strongly urge people not to vote for Kemp. The Socialists' propaganda was definitely anti-religious, and Kemp was deliberately lending himself to it to advance his own political career. It came as a little blow to Audrey when she heard this. Not that the priest held any brief for Hubert. He would have preferred his flock to abstain altogether from going to the polls.

On the night of the great meeting at which Kemp was to speak, Hubert was to attend a political dinner in Millborough. It was his own suggestion that Audrey should sleep at the Settlement that night, although hitherto he had always refused to allow her to do this. Perhaps he thought she was not

taking a sufficiently active part. Evangeline Standen was canvassing assiduously for Kemp, and the two were often to be seen together in Millborough and its environs. Mrs. Grazebrook had gone abroad with her husband, so there was really no one to deter Evangeline from taking a prominent part in the campaign.

Audrey was walking alone one day when she met them. Kemp lifted his hat and would have passed on, but Evangeline ran up to her.

She held out a slim gloved hand. The two girls looked at each other. Then Evangeline said:

"I suppose you're frightfully busy canvassing for your brother? It must be very exciting to have a personal interest in the result!"

"I'm not canvassing," said Audrey.

"Oh, but why not? You should, you know! It's such fun talking the people over."

Kemp stood apart watching them.

"I'm afraid I don't know enough about politics."

Audrey's voice was cold and quiet.

"I suppose you won't come to the meeting to-morrow night? Some people think there'll be a most awful row. I do hope there will!"

"No, I am not coming."

Kemp came up to them.

"Miss Standen, if we're going out to Vale Park we ought not to lose any time." His voice sounded slightly irritable.

"You see what a tyrant Mr. Kemp is," laughed Evangeline. She was flushed and excited. Kemp was working her to death, and she enjoyed the sensation. She was a great success, and she was aware of it, and it gratified her to think that Kemp was aware of it, too. And if there had ever been any rivalry between herself and Audrey Tressider it was quite inconceivable that there should be any at the

present juncture. Audrey could not possibly work for Kemp to the detriment of her own brother. Besides, she had heard on good authority that Hubert had quite put his foot down upon any friendship between them. There had been a row after the Vandoms' party, and since then Audrey had been seen hardly at all in Millborough. How Evangeline acquired all her information it would have been difficult to say, but however inaccurate it was, there was generally a substratum of truth in it. She believed in common with all Millborough that Audrey's relations with her brother were extremely strained, and she imagined that this must be due to the fact that Kemp had singled her out for attention when she first came. He was always reticent on the point, refusing to discuss it with her, but Evangeline was certain that her own reading of the case was the correct one. She had feared Audrey's influence, at first. But as she looked at her to-day that fear diminished a little. "I am stronger and cleverer than she is," she thought. And she could help Kemp in ways that were impossible to Audrey. She had been helping him ever since the death of Mr. Smith, and she had come to the task with fresh zest for conquest. There was no Beatrice at hand to hurl sarcasms upon her for her unconventional conduct. Mrs. Standen had long ceased to count as a restraining influence. She merely shook her head over her daughter, and returned to her knitting, novel-reading, and gossip. She never believed that any harm would come of it. Evangeline was not likely to marry Kemp, and although her engagement to Wanford was now definitely in abeyance, she could still marry well if she chose.

Kemp spoke again, with a slight increase of impatience.

"We must really be going. Are you still working at the Settlement, Miss Tressider?"

"Yes. I am going to stay there to-morrow night," said Audrey. "Hubert will be dining in town."

"Really?" he said, in a tone of polite astonishment.

They left her then and Audrey walked quietly homewards.

"I wonder she stays in Millborough. I believe she and Hubert don't get on very well," said Evangeline to Kemp as they moved in the direction of Vale Park. Her tall figure swung along lightly, gracefully, by his side. She was very smartly dressed, and liked to think that she and her companion were attracting attention.

"Don't they?" was all Kemp said.

"She must be miserable there. It's hideously dull for her."

"I have often wondered why she stays here. I have been told that she is quite free to live where she likes."

"Perhaps Millborough has some secret attraction for her," said Evangeline. There was meaning in the glance she bestowed upon Kemp.

He answered in a non-committal manner:

"Perhaps it has. But it is difficult to believe that Millborough can have any attraction for anyone, unless they have ties here."

"Well, she has ties of a sort," said Evangeline.

Kemp relapsed into silence. He was thinking of Audrey. She was changed, greatly changed, since she first came to Millborough. She had looked so happy then, young and eager and full of life. Now she was pale, quiet, and wore a repressed, controlled look that made her face ungirlish. She was not happy, and the thought hurt him. He wanted to

take her away—far away—and teach her to be happy again. . . . He still clung to the belief that away from her present surroundings she might learn to love him. She was not wholly indifferent to him; there had been moments when he felt that his own love—so imperfectly revealed—had evoked some response from her. But to love her meant that his work in Millborough must cease. She had shown him something of her invincible exterior loyalty to Hubert. It was something he could neither diminish nor destroy. Kemp knew that he had had to choose between her and his work, and he had deliberately chosen his work. But always her slight figure, her dark beautiful eyes, seemed to stand between him and Hubert. Sometimes the thought of her had actually restrained him from uttering all he wished to utter in his attacks upon her brother. It was his one concession to the weakness that her coming had wrought in him. If she would only go away. . . .

Evangeline's voice struck suddenly across the silence. She had a rather slow deep voice that lent a certain attraction to her most commonplace speeches.

"Beatrice told me that Myles Dorling is in love with her. I expect that engagement will come off when he returns from Africa. That will be about the end of the year. Mrs. Corby is sure to arrange it."

"I remember your sister told me about it," said Kemp.

He did not believe it, of course, he was sure that Audrey had been perfectly heart-whole when she came to Millborough. Yet the old fierce pang of jealousy touched him, like a sword. Yes, it was what everyone must wish for her, a happy marriage with a man of her own world. Why should he try to come between her and such a desirable fate as that? Where she loved she would be very faithful,

very loyal. This thought came to him with a pain that approached agony. Was it fair of him to take advantage of her youth, her sympathy, and teach her to love him, a man of the people, far removed from her by all things belonging to heredity and environment? . . .

"It would be eminently suitable," said Evangeline, wishing that the news could have been—as she had hoped—a surprise to him. She would have liked to watch its effect upon him. She still believed that he cherished a secret passionate interest in Audrey.

Kemp did not seem to Evangeline quite *à la hauteur* that afternoon. He was very silent, and even when they reached Vale Park she could see that he was not exerting himself as he generally did when canvassing. Vale Park was a suburb of Millborough and only slightly less grimy than the town itself. It was inhabited largely by clerks and better-class shop-keepers, with a sprinkling of smaller manufacturers. Perhaps it was the class that appealed least of all to Kemp. With the working-man he was at his ease, his birth and upbringing ensured that. But with these people belonging to a slightly higher rung than himself by birth and now immeasureably beneath him in the social scale, he had nothing in common. He was above them now; he had risen by his own ability, his own genius, and he was inclined to despise what he considered the narrow, smug, and commonplace nature of their lives. For the most part Nonconformist, with a hereditary horror of "Rome," they on their side regarded Kemp as a Jesuit in disguise, and were convinced that he was working less for the cause of labour than for the subtle interests of the Roman Church. Most of them would have preferred to give their vote to a Buddhist rather than to a Catholic. Kemp was sensitively aware of the thinly-

veiled antagonism that met his efforts. Religious intolerance he had often encountered, and he knew how to deal with it, but this suggestion that his work had a dual aim, angered him.

"We can do no good here," he said sullenly, as they left one of the small semi-detached houses with its neat, curtained windows.

"It's such a pity you don't free yourself altogether and openly from the Catholic Church," said Evangeline. "It can mean very little to you now, I'm sure. You go to Abbot's End to humour Lady Ince, don't you? She is an ardent pursuer of souls. But the time's come for you to take a strong, definite line. You *must*—if you want people to give you their full confidence."

"And are you aware that Father Blake is actually urging the Catholics in Millborough not to vote for me, because I have lent myself to the Socialists' cause? It seems I am neither fish, flesh, nor fowl!"

"It's your own fault," said Evangeline, who had long wished for an opportunity to speak to him on the subject. "The fact is the majority of Englishmen prefer not to vote for a Catholic. And if you can't even count on the votes of your own co-religionists it seems to me the sooner you break openly with them the better."

"It isn't so easy," he said. "It's very difficult to get away from the things that belonged to one in boyhood. And I don't want to get away from them either. I prefer to fight and lose. . . ."

But the temptation was no new one to him. He had often dallied with it, idly contemplating it, and then putting it from him. At one time in a fit of discouragement he had even seriously considered it. His religion was a barrier between himself and those whom he most wished to serve. It prevented him from enjoying the full confidence of his adherents.

There was always a little fear of "Rome" in the background, especially in those northern manufacturing cities that were strongholds of Nonconformity and Free-thought, whose advocates were ever at war with each other, but more strongly united than they perhaps knew, in their common dread of foreign and popish influence. While the temptation to break openly with his Church had thus presented itself to Kemp under a singularly alluring and attractive guise, he knew that its accomplishment could never be an easy task. Careless Catholic that he was, he was yet aware how strongly those ancient forces and influences held him. It was a spiritual bondage, and if he chafed against it he still knew its power to hold him. And since his visit to Abbot's End at Christmas, when stimulated by environment he had yielded himself up to those practices he had neglected but never forsworn, the temptation, such as it was, had assailed him less frequently. He had even thought of the approach of Easter with a certain dread, as if he would not be able to resist the urgent call it would make upon him.

"Unless you've been brought up a Catholic you can hardly realize the enormous power the Church has to hold you," he told Evangeline now. "It seems to be waiting for you everywhere. It . . . it is the strongest thing in the world."

"But you mustn't let it interfere with your political career," she said, with a note of appeal in her voice. "Of course, one knows it is very beautiful and attractive and all that, but you've got your way to make."

The man who had been called unscrupulous by his enemies turned to her with a sharp decision of manner.

"Yes, and I'm going to make it. But I shall pay my own price! And the one you are asking me to pay is rather too heavy."

Evangeline relapsed into silence. So these things held him more strongly than she had imagined. And the fact of their common religion must make a formidable link between him and Audrey Tressider, however much their political opinions might divide them. This reflection discomfited Miss Standen. Kemp had a trick of eluding her, just when she believed her influence over him was really making itself felt.

"I shall be very sorry if you lose Millborough when you might have just romped in," she observed. "Hubert Tressider has never been so unpopular in the place as he is now."

Kemp looked at her with a long, strange look.

"If they return Tressider they will have the man they deserve," he said.

CHAPTER XXVI

"YOU ARE COMING TO HEAR ME SPEAK"

THE day fixed for the great meeting had been very wet. Towards evening it left off raining, and the wind dropped. The skies cleared, and one or two stars showed, as it were, reluctant points of light.

Hubert had arranged to motor Audrey down to the Settlement about seven o'clock. He had one or two business people to see before the public dinner, at which he was to be the principal guest. When the time drew near for their departure, Audrey went into her sitting-room to wait for her brother. Her bag, ready-packed, had been taken down into the hall.

She opened the window. The night was warm for April. A faint breeze stirred languidly; it was heavy, without freshness. In the distance she could see the faint illumination of the town, as it lay in its shallow cup. It was built irregularly, to follow the abrupt bend and curve of the river. A grey mirage lingered down there, like a fetid mist. *"Or ci attristiam. . . ."* She could never look down at Millborough from her window without recalling that quotation of Kemp's.

She had a strong presentiment that somehow or other Kemp would contrive to see her to-night. She had informed him casually that she was going to sleep at the Settlement, and she felt assured that he would try to arrange a meeting. She did not know how; she did not ask herself. But, of course, he would be perfectly aware of Hubert's movements. Perhaps he would even so contrive that she should hear him speak. As these thoughts passed through

her mind, lingering there with an almost agreeable persistency, Audrey was unable to persuade herself that they were wholly fantastic.

She wished to see him. She wished to hear him speak. Her indifference as to whether she remained in Millborough or not, gave her a certain recklessness. The fear of defying Hubert was at an end. And like all people released from a particular fear, she felt a strange sense of freedom that was exhilarating. Just this once, she told herself, if Kemp gave her the opportunity she would see him and speak to him without any dread of consequences. And she would listen, she assured herself, to whatever he had to say.

Hubert opened the door abruptly. Interrupting these thoughts which to her seemed almost like guilty ones, since they were in direct defiance of his commands, his sudden entrance caused Audrey to colour violently. She looked up with a startled expression, and a look almost of fear came into her eyes.

"I startled you," said Hubert. "What is the matter?"

His bright, steel-like eyes examined her face with a pitiless scrutiny.

"You—did not startle me," she said coldly.

"If you are ready, I am," said Hubert. He had his hand on the door.

"I am quite ready, Hubert."

They went downstairs. Outside, the motor was standing in readiness. Audrey stepped in and Hubert followed her. He lit a cigarette and began to smoke. Audrey sat there, silent, motionless. She felt oddly excited as if something were going to happen, as if her life at Millborough were to reach it culminating point to-night. The excitement lent her a curiously vivid look. Her cheeks were flushed

and her eyes shone brilliantly. She looked beautiful. . . . Hubert switched on the little electric light and suddenly gazed at her.

"Why, Audrey," he said, "are you planning anything very delectable to-night? You look like a girl going to her first ball."

But though his words were light he felt a certain anxiety. She was an enigma to him, this sister. She had thoughts of her own. He had made no progress in his endeavour to mould her, to train her to his own way of thinking. All he had accomplished was to make her fear him, and that fear had made her cold and unapproachable and silent with him. But there had been no signs of her yielding her opinion to his. He had terrorized rather than conquered her. She had lived under his roof for nearly six months, and to-night he felt that they were further away than ever from a mutual understanding. In his electoral campaign she had tacitly refused to help him. She had never recovered from the shock of Davy's death; the horror of the incident had unnerved her. She was too young, he told himself, to have a proper sense of proportion, to look at life as a whole.

As she did not answer, he said:

"I hope Mrs. Bryant will not allow you to go out alone to-night. Unless she accompanies you, I should prefer you to remain in the house. It is not a night for you to wander about alone. Kemp is going to speak at this monster meeting—he always manages to inflame his hearers. There will probably be an uproar."

"It is not likely that I shall go out alone." Audrey's voice was quite controlled. "We shall go down to the Girls' Club, I think—it is only a few doors from the Settlement and isn't anywhere near the Town Hall."

Hubert was satisfied. Kemp would be far too busy to think of Audrey to-night. Rumour was again freely coupling his name with that of Evangeline Standen, who was helping him so assiduously in his present task. He wondered if she intended to marry him. . . .

They had reached Millborough now, and the motor went swiftly through the lighted streets. The town was astir, and already a considerable crowd had gathered outside the Town Hall, waiting for the doors to open. Audrey leaned back in the car. She did not wish to be recognized. Her face was heavily swathed in a black veil tied round a small, close-fitting hat. They stopped at last outside the house in Colt's Lane. Audrey descended, and while the chauffeur was closing the door again, she waited on the pavement.

"Remember what I told you, Audrey." Hubert said in his sharp authoritative voice. "No going out alone."

"Very well, Hubert."

She rang the bell. Mrs. Bryant was in the hall as she entered. She held out a hand in greeting.

"So glad you've come, Miss Tressider. There's a lot of work before us this evening. By the way I'm not sure I can spare you for the Girls' Club. The Davy baby is ill, and we want someone to go down there with milk and brandy."

"Oh, would it be all right for me to go?" said Audrey.

"Why, what do you mean?" said Mrs. Bryant, in some astonishment.

"I mean—she must hate the very name of Tressider."

A rather strange expression came into Mrs. Bryant's face. She hesitated for a moment and then said:

"You are not judged by your brother in Millborough, Miss Tressider. You are a Catholic and he is not. You come here as a Catholic, not as his sister."

They went upstairs into the community-room until supper was announced. During those few spare minutes Mrs. Bryant, who was seldom idle, began to put a few things into a basket in readiness to be taken down to Mrs. Davy. She did not share Hubert's fear of letting Audrey walk about alone in Millborough at night. She had often had girls quite as young as Audrey at the Settlement, and they had gone out and come in as a matter of course, whenever it had been required of them. The thing was to get the work done, and Mrs. Bryant always extracted the last ounce of energy from her helpers. No one was spared, least of all herself. "If you want to be idle please stay at home," she used to say to anyone who showed a disposition to be indolent or unwilling. "There is no need for you to come here at all unless you wish to. But if you do come you must help."

Audrey had never been thus rebuked for indolence; she had on the contrary been inclined to overexert herself. She needed a curb, not a spur, Mrs. Bryant sometimes, good-humouredly informed her. And to-night she made no demur at the prospect of going down to Green Row to visit Mrs. Davy. She felt freed from Hubert's jurisdiction, and the sense of emancipation was a delicious one. Nevertheless, it was with some sense of guilt that she refrained from communicating Hubert's wishes regarding herself to Mrs. Bryant. The circumstances seemed to demand that she should go to Green Row to-night. And it would give her an opportunity of speaking to Mrs. Davy whom she had not seen since her husband's death. She wanted to find out if she was re-

ceiving adequate help from the firm for herself and her child. But she had never even suggested going there—she had always felt a vague fear that she would not be welcome.

"If you are going to Green Row, you had better start," said Mrs. Bryant directly supper was over. "But if you don't feel inclined, I know Miss Wilkes will go."

"I should like to go," said Audrey. She took up the basket.

"Oh, by the way, there's this big meeting to-night. But it won't be till nine o'clock and you'll be back before then, of course. And you don't have to go near the Town Hall. Keep to the quiet streets."

Of course, there would be no chance of meeting Hubert on her way to Green Row. It was already nearly eight, and at eight o'clock the dinner to which he had been invited was to begin. Audrey drew her veil very closely over her face. She walked quickly, looking neither to the right nor to the left. As she neared Green Row the streets began to be quite deserted, and the lamps burned rather dimly in the thick, misty atmosphere that always hung over Millborough. Without being actually afraid Audrey felt slightly nervous as she passed along these strangely quiet and deserted streets. She looked at the rows of mean little houses with their closely darkened windows, and wondered what sort of lives their inhabitants led. Lives of monotonous poverty and penury, yet withal, brightened, perhaps, by those natural joys that fall to the lot of the poor as well as to that of the rich. The joys of love, of maternity, of work well-accomplished. . . . When she had seen Mrs. Davy with her baby in her arms, she had not pitied her, she had envied her, as the possessor of great riches.

All the time another thought was dancing in the back of her mind. She tried to refuse it entrance, she would not dwell upon it, but always it was there, beckoning to her. Had Kemp anything to do with this errand of hers to Mrs. Davy's house to-night? Had he planned it so as to obtain a glimpse of her? He was perfectly capable of it, and she remembered his slight but ill-concealed astonishment when she had told him that she was to stay at the Settlement that night. Even as she spoke the words, she had felt that he would make some use of that information.

She knocked timidly at Mrs. Davy's door. There was no passage, and the door opened into the one living room, in the far corner of which was a steep flight of stairs, leading to the bedroom above. Since her husband's death Mrs. Davy had let the bedroom to a woman who was employed in a factory all day. Otherwise it would have been impossible for her to remain in the little house which had been her home ever since she married. Squalid and dismal as it was, with its flagged floor and its walls running with damp, she clung to it as the scene of all the happiness she had ever known.

By the light of a small fire Audrey saw Mrs. Davy bending over the baby's crib, as she lifted the latch and came into the room. The woman turned quickly, and rising, came towards her.

"Oh, miss, I'm so glad it's you! I've been wantting to see you."

Mrs. Davy looked slightly more pallid and emaciated since her husband's death. She had been going out to work, and the effort had proved too much for her poor strength. And the baby, entrusted to a neighbour, had been neglected.

"They say I ought to take her to the infirmary, miss, but I'd do anything to keep her here."

"Is she better?" said Audrey, putting her basket down on the table and beginning to produce its contents.

"Yes, miss, she do seem a little easier to-night."

Audrey took out her purse. She put a sovereign into Mrs. Davy's hand.

"I want you to get whatever is necessary for her and yourself," she said. "And you shall have some more when that's gone. I do want to be of use to you. . . . I've been so sorry for you all this time."

Mrs. Davy was too anxious about her baby to indulge in grief at the loss of her husband just then. She must keep all her strength for the task in hand. She thanked Audrey gratefully. and said:

"I was sure you would be, miss. It was no fault of yours. When anyone reminded me you were Mr. Tressider's sister I always took your part, miss. I did say you'd always been that kind to me, bringing blue ribbons for the baby and all. It seemed like you were different, and I knew you'd be sorry. Not that I blame Mr. Tressider. He didn't know, perhaps, how dangerous that vat was."

Tears filled her eyes and she turned abruptly away. When she looked at Audrey again her face was calm.

"Besides, miss, I try to be a good Catholic, and I didn't dare keep any thoughts in my heart against Mr. Tressider. It wasn't easy to forgive him just at first, but the thought of you helped me."

"If it did, I'm very glad," said Audrey, deeply touched.

She put some milk in a saucepan and set it on the fire. While she was thus engaged, Mrs. Davy sat by the crib, watching her baby, with an expression upon her face that was passionately maternal. Audrey stood there stirring the milk; she was thankful to have the little occupation. When it was boiling

she lifted it off the fire and poured it into a bowl that stood on the table. Then she said suddenly:

"What help are you getting from the firm, Mrs. Davy?"

It was before the days of compulsory insurance, and "Tressider's" had never been generous in the matter of pensions or compassionate allowances. The woman hesitated before replying, then she said:

"I'm not getting anything regular yet, miss. It's to come up before the Board of Directors next time. Seems as if they can prove it's been a man's own fault, through his carelessness-like, they don't give so much."

"What have you been living on?" asked Audrey.

"Well, they paid the funeral, the firm did, miss, and sent me something to go on with. And I got work. I managed all right what with letting the bedroom until baby fell ill. It's illness that ruins us, miss. Seems as if it always came to swallow up our savings. And I've always tried to put something by, and so did Alf. He was a careful man, miss, and never touched a drop."

"And you had no other help?" Audrey was a little insistent from motives of her own.

"Well, Miss, to tell you the truth, Mr. Kemp did help me, but he told me not to say anything about it. Seems he can't bear his generosity to be spoke of in Millborough. Yet there's no gentleman so open-handed as Mr. Kemp, miss."

"Have you seen him lately?" asked Audrey. She waited almost in suspense for the woman's reply.

"He was here the day before yesterday," Mrs. Davy said, after a moment's pause. "And he did say, miss. that if he got a minute he'd be round to-night. Only, he's got to speak at this meeting, and he wasn't sure if he'd have time to look in."

She had hardly said the words when there was a

light tap at the door. It was the careful knock of someone aware of sickness within. Mrs. Davy went to the door and opened it noiselessly. A tall figure was standing on the threshold. Even before Audrey caught a glimpse of his face, she knew that it was Kemp from one glance at that gigantic silhouette. She moved a step forward and the next moment her hand was in his, his eyes were looking down into her own.

Although she felt a curious sense of unreality she was not surprised. Had she not told herself over and over again that he would certainly make some attempt to see her to-night? He had not caught her unawares; she had been prepared for him, had lent herself without rebellion to his little plot. And it was worth it—this strange moment of mutual recognition, arranged, accepted, even necessary. . . .

Mrs. Davy went back to the baby, and Kemp said to Audrey in a low tone:

"If you wait a moment I will walk back with you."

"Yes," said Audrey.

He crossed the room, and gazed at the tiny occupant of the cradle with eyes grown strangely tender.

"Improvement continues, I hope, Mrs. Davy?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"Has Dr. Wilson been in to-day?"

"Yes, sir. He was here this morning."

"And you've got all you want for the present?"

"Yes, thank you, sir. Oh, and thank you, sir, for the coal you sent in."

"Oh, that's all right," said Kemp hastily.

In the small low room he looked out of proportion. He was so tall that if he had lifted his hand above his head he could easily have touched the ceiling. To-night he looked imposing. Had he not seen the crowds thronging to the Town Hall hours before the doors opened, to hear him—Adam Kemp

—speak? He knew that everything depended upon the success of that night's work. And he had little anxiety as to the result. He was the prophet, about to deliver his message.

"I mustn't stay. But as Miss Tressider is here I will walk part of the way home with her." He turned to Audrey. "It's late for you to be out to-night. Millborough is off its head with excitement."

They said good-bye to Mrs. Davy and went out into the little quiet street. Overhead there was a moon. They walked down Green Row in silence. Then suddenly Kemp said:

"You are coming to hear me speak. I have thought of a plan. And if you are back rather late at the Settlement you must try and invent some excuse." Giving her a searching glance he added: "I don't think anyone will recognize you in that veil, although I'm certain I should do so myself from the way you carry your head!"

Audrey made no reply. She was as wax in his hands. She would go with him if he wished. The consequences could take care of themselves. She had no wish now to stay in Millborough, it was hurting her too cruelly. She felt hardly afraid of Hubert now; he seemed to have lost all power over her.

"I sha'n't risk High Street, of course," continued Kemp, "we must go down Glover Road. There is a private entrance there, and it is to be shut to-night, but I have a key."

Yes, he had planned it all. He had known that it would happen thus—his meeting with her at Mrs. Davy's, this walk back together through the ill-lighted, deserted streets, this final imposition of his will upon hers. Perhaps he was not quite prepared for her silent acquiescence and submission for he said:

"You have no scruples about coming?"

"No," said Audrey. "I wish to come. I am quite ready."

In the distance, down a side street, they could see a great crowd gathered outside the Town Hall —the multitudes who had not been able to gain admission. Audrey bent her head and walked a little apart from Kemp. She wondered if he would despise her for so readily consenting to accompany him. She did not know that he was losing all sense of the fantastic unwisdom of his enterprise in the bewildering joy of knowing her there close to him, of knowing, too, that to-night she would hear him speak. At last he would have an opportunity of giving her a clear insight into his work and aims for the amelioration of existing labour conditions in Millborough. Knowing her present, he felt certain that inspiration would come to him, that he would speak as he had never spoken before. And even if he had to make her suffer cruelly he would teach her the truth. Her very presence would surely stimulate him into an eloquence which would be without parallel in the whole of his public career.

He took her into the great building by a small back entrance; they passed in wholly unobserved. They stumbled up a little staircase, and into a small dusty room furnished with a table and a couple of wooden chairs.

"This is my private room—I never allow anyone to disturb me just before a speech," he said. "I shall lock the door while I am speaking so that no one can possibly come in."

He turned up the gas. Its yellow flare illuminated the little room, and fell full upon Audrey.

"Put up your veil—I want to see your face," said Kemp.

She obeyed with difficulty; her fingers were cold

and trembling. Her face, thus revealed, was very pale.

"Afraid?" he said.

"A . . . a little. . . ."

"Sit down and rest," he said more gently, puliing a chair towards her. He stood there near her with one hand lying on the table. "There is only a thin panelling between this room and the hall—you'll be able to hear every word that is said."

At that moment a loud burst of sustained applause heralded the appearance of some speaker.

"Aren't you going on to the platform?" said Audrey.

"No, I never do till my turn comes. This is one of the delegates speaking now. A very sound man but dull as ditch-water. By the way you must wait till I have finished. Then I shall return to you, and see you safely out of the place. You know your way back?"

"Yes—yes—" said Audrey.

"They won't have gone to bed?"

"I have a latch-key. And Mrs. Bryant seldom gets back from the Girls' Club until half past ten. There are things to put away."

"You won't be afraid to be left here alone?"

"I don't think so," said Audrey.

They remained there in silence. Kemp was in a state of fierce. if suppressed, excitement. He could not keep still, but paced the tiny room like a caged animal. And always his eyes turned restlessly towards Audrey. She was different to-night. He did not dare believe that she was beginning to care for him, yet there was something in her eyes that told him she was not wholly indifferent to him.

He saw Tressider defeated—defeated on all sides. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

"I WANT YOU TO LEAVE TRESSIDER FOR ME!"

THE speaker's voice died away at last, and during the little storm of applause that followed, Kemp left her. She heard the key turn sharply in the lock as he closed the door. A tiny narrow passage divided the room from the platform on one side; on the other the thin panelling of the partition wall alone separated them.

Audrey heard the sudden outburst of deafening applause that greeted Kemp's appearance on the platform. Something in the sound of it thrilled her as well as startled her. She pictured the sea of upturned faces—Evangeline Standen's perhaps among them—she seemed to see the groups on the platform, and in their midst, that tall, impressive figure with the pale face, the black hair, the deep-set burning eyes. . . . Involuntarily she put her hands against her heart as if to still its quick and violent beating.

After—as it seemed to her—an interminable time, the shouts and cheering died away into silence, and Kemp's voice sounded, so loud that he might have been standing by her side. She lifted her head a little to listen. The beginning was commonplace enough, yet even to the simple conventional phrases, his voice, melodious, powerful, impressive, lent a dignity that could not be denied.

"My friends—for if you are Millborough men I hope I may call you all my friends—it is not too much to say that the fate of your town lies in your hands—in the impressions, the unalterable convictions, the determined resolutions—you will carry away in your hearts to-night. . . .

Audrey had no idea of the passing of the time while she sat and listened with a strained attention to Kemp's words. Adam himself was aware that during all the first part of his speech he was thinking only of his audience; he was feeling his way with them, getting into that intimate *rapprochement* with them which was absolutely necessary if his words were to influence them permanently. He was acutely sensitive himself, and it sometimes seemed to him when he was speaking. that he was playing upon an instrument of many strings. It was essential that each separate string should respond to his touch, and be in harmony too with all the rest. So at the commencement he was moderate, restrained, equable. His pale face and blazing eyes held his audience as he could always hold them, spell-bound, interested, silent, in an almost hypnotized attention. But he knew too that before he had finished he would speak to the one listener—the girl who sat invisible a few yards from him, beyond the thin screen of panelling.

He began, lightly at first, but with an always deadly precision, to touch upon the dangerous trades that were carried on in Millborough. He pointed to the blighted and blistered land that lay for miles around the town—land upon which neither tree nor shrub nor flower could grow to maturity or perfection. He used it as a simile with which to compare the blighted and diseased lives of the men who passed their working days amid the poisonous and deadly fumes of gas and chemicals . . . slowly and surely perishing under their influence. The personal dangers that surrounded these men, the temptations that assailed them from the foul and hot atmosphere in which they lived, the overmastering thirst that rendered it impossible for them to be sober, self-respecting citizens—all these he alluded

to in a calm grave voice that scarcely had a hint of passion in it. But the fire was only smouldering. . . . An unmistakable allusion to Davy's death evoked a low hiss that echoed sibilantly from wall to wall, from roof to floor. It was a sinister ominous sound, declaring the temper of that great assemblage, and conveying a subtle menace. Stirred by this response to the very depths of his being, realizing, too, how unerringly he had laid his finger on the pulse of that mighty gathering, Adam Kemp paused for a second, his arms folded, his burning eyes bent towards the listening multitude. Then with head flung back he spoke, and his voice rang like a clarion-cry dramatically through the hall.

The very fact that Audrey was there, was listening to him unseen and perhaps in trembling silence, stimulated him to an eloquence he had never before exhibited. No name was mentioned, but it was obvious to everyone present that the attack all had been waiting for, was now beginning.

"What shall we say of this man who has the supreme audacity, the pitiable complacency, to come forward as your candidate to represent your interests in Parliament?" His voice sank to a whisper, then gaining impetus, it roared with a thunder-like emphasis. *"We have nothing to say of him. We will be silent. Let those speak who toil for him at starvation wage . . . who wear out youth and hope and happiness in his devil's service . . . who perform like dumb, tortured beasts his degrading tasks . . . who die scalded and consumed in his fiery, vitriol vats leaving their widows to starve at his doors without help or sustenance. . . . Let those speak who stand day after day, week after week, before the hell of his red-hot furnaces, until death, cruel but kindly, shall come to release them from the torture of their thirst. All I shall say of him is this: Will*

you choose him? Shall he represent you? Are you so much his slaves that his whip shall drive you to the polls to vote for him despite all his cruelty, his indifference, his refusal to hear your cries? Dives has been in hell for two thousand years because he fed delicately and clothed himself in fine linen while Lazarus lay starving and diseased at his gates . . . receiving no crumb from his table, no linen to bind his sores. I tell you Dives is with you to-day in this town of Millborough. Does he hear your cries and the cries of your children? Does he care though Lazarus lies at his gate, tortured, diseased, burnt, in his service? You know that he does not care. It is for you to say, therefore, whether he shall represent you—whether indeed he is qualified to represent the workingmen of Millborough in the assembly of the nation!"

Audrey rose involuntarily to her feet. It seemed to her that by her very presence she was participating in the attack upon her brother, that she was lending a tacit acquiescence to the terrible indictment against him. She could hear the reiterated cries of "No—no—we won't have him! Down with Tressider!" echoing from every part of the hall. For a long time Kemp was unable to utter a word. The stormy passions he had aroused showed no sign of abating. Audrey felt as if the room beyond must be filled with a swaying angry throng that had passed out of all control. She could hear the yelling, the cursing, the hissing, the clamourous shrieks of rage. And by bringing her here to listen to him to-night Kemp had humbled her to the very dust. This had been his purpose. The man had pretended to love her that he might shame her. . . . His voice rang in her ears. Over and over again those terrible merciless phrases echoed through her brain. Oh, why had no voice in all that vast assembly been

raised to refute the hideous accusations Kemp had brought against Hubert? She sank back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Her presence had done nothing to deter him from the contemplated violence of his attack. Rather it seemed to her that the very flood of his eloquence had been directed towards her, that the knowledge of her presence had only stimulated him to a fiercer, more vindictive indictment of Hubert.

She had been punished, cruelly punished, for disregarding Hubert's wishes. If he ever heard of her presence there that night, he would surely never forgive her. She saw herself suddenly alone—alienated from Hubert, separated eternally from Kemp, who must surely include her in his insensate hatred of her brother. It seemed to her then that all her life at Millborough had fallen upon irreparable ruin. . . .

The yells and shrieks continued even after the meeting had been officially anounced to be at an end. Meaningless voices returned votes of thanks —she heard Adam Kemp alluded to in terms of praise, while his courage and sincerity of purpose were held up for admiration. But the crowd was evidently in no mood to listen to mere polite phrases, and the succeeding speakers had some difficulty in obtaining a hearing. Audrey would have left the room had this course been possible. But the door to the platform, as well as the one leading to the staircase and side entrance, was locked. There was no means of escape. She had to wait there until it was Kemp's pleasure to come and release her. She was his prisoner. . . .

At last after a long time—hours it seemed to her —she heard the key turn in the lock, and a shadow fell across the table. She looked up and saw Kemp standing there, motionless, in front of her. His

face was pale with the pallor of sheer exhaustion, but his eyes shone with a triumphant expression that seemed to her malignant. She turned her face away from him. He should not look into her eyes and read there the depths of her shame, her abasement, her humiliation.

"It was not safe to come to you sooner," he said, in a voice that was carefully matter-of-fact. "I had to get rid of one or two people. But the coast is pretty clear now, and if you come at once I don't think you will be so very late after all."

Audrey rose wearily. She did not speak.

Kemp stood there waiting. He felt the presence between them of unexpressed things—of things that perhaps could never be said after to-night.

"Could you hear me well?" he asked.

"Too well." Her voice was cold and weary.

"The truth was too hard for you to bear? You are one of the weaklings after all?" There was pity in his tone—pity with a faint admixture of ironic contempt.

"If it was the truth you should not have brought me here to listen to it."

"I told you once that you had far better remain in your happy ignorance. I advised you to go away from Millborough. But you preferred to stay, and I was determined that at least you should not live on here in ignorance. You are too—*great* for that." He flung the adjective at her almost with violence.

She stood there, not saying a word, her eyes fixed upon the ground. She seemed to him then like some drooping, white flower over which a mighty storm had passed. . . .

"Will you tell me that you forgive me?" he said more gently, and coming towards her. "Remember I had to say certain things whether they hurt you or not. And I was glad to know you were there."

"You wished to hurt me?" she said, raising her eyes in which he could read only a profound abasement. "You made me come—just for that?"

"No, it was not quite for that," he answered. A strange look came into his face. "I wished you to know me better—to understand my aims, the things I am working for. And I wished you to know, because—because I love you."

"Because you love me?" She could have smiled. To keep her on the rack all those hours, because he loved her? To plunge her deep into the waters of humiliation—because he loved her?

"I think it was a strange way of showing your love!" she said, with a touch of scorn that made Kemp wince.

He came up to her then and took her hand resolutely in his.

"I love you," he said again. "I am asking you to be my wife. I could not ask you till you knew the truth."

She drew away her hand. "I can never be your wife. You must understand that—once for all."

"Because of to-night?" he asked.

"Because of to-night—and many other things. I should never be allowed to marry you."

Kemp's arms were round her; his face was bent down close to hers.

"Those are not reasons," he said. "The only reason you can have to refuse me—the only valid reason—is because you don't love me. Is it true that you don't love me?"

She did not try to free herself from the immense security of those arms.

"Is it true—Audrey?" he said.

"I can't tell you. I don't understand myself. How could I love you?"

"You can and must love me," he said.

"You want me to leave all my world for you?"

"I want you to leave Tressider for me."

She freed herself then and stood facing him.

"Is that what you've been working for? To punish Hubert through me? Is it all part of your hatred—your insensate hatred—of him?"

"You are saying hard things to me. But I never hated him so little as I do at this moment."

"Because . . . you know you've defeated him. After to-night he hasn't the ghost of a chance of winning the seat. You've inflamed the men against him—you've dragged him through the dust. . . ." There was a splendid anger in her tone. She looked superb as she thus arraigned him.

Kemp put out his hand.

"Ah, my dear, say what you like if you will only love me. . . ."

"Yes, I love you," said Audrey, after what had seemed to Kemp an interminable pause. "But I am not going to marry you. I am never going to see you again. I owe that to Hubert. But you shall not spoil my life as you've spoilt his." She threw back her head proudly.

"Audrey—if you love me, don't send me away. . . ."

"I shall never see you again. I love you—and it makes me ashamed to think of it. Now I am going. . . ."

She moved towards the door. Kemp followed her, unlocking it, and then holding it open for her to pass through. They went together into the narrow deserted street.

"Now please leave me. I am going to walk back alone."

It was nearly half past ten when she reached the Settlement. Mrs. Bryant had just come in; she was standing in the hall, and seemed a little astonished to see Audrey enter.

"Why, my dear child, how late you are! What on earth have you been doing?"

"Don't you remember? I went to see Mrs. Davy," said Audrey.

"But you can't have been there all these hours?"

Audrey resented the questioning, the more so because she had firmly resolved not to tell Mrs. Bryant the truth. The fewer people who knew of that shameful episode the better. But she had almost made up her mind to tell Hubert. He would be so angry that he would be certain to send her away. And in a world of pain and confusion only one thought stood out quite clearly in her mind. She wanted to leave Millborough as soon as possible.

"I am sorry I am so late," she said quietly, "please do not ask me anything more. I shall be going home to-morrow, and I think I shall probably leave Millborough quite soon."

She passed on to the staircase leaving an astonished and considerably mystified Mrs. Bryant standing in the hall.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"YOU SHALL NOT DISGRACE OUR NAME!"

AFTERWARDS when Audrey looked back upon the little scene that had taken place between her and Kemp that night, the part she had least shame in remembering was her own frank confession of love for him. She was glad to think that she had had the courage to tell him, and that there had been in that ardent moment neither deceit nor lies between them. She loved him, and it was right that he should be aware of the sacrifice she was making in her resolve never to see him again. The situation had indeed become so complicated that this wave of truth had been needed to clear it a little. It had required a considerable effort to speak thus frankly. But she had the joy, too, of knowing that his love was immutably hers. That in spite of all things he wished to marry her. At present she seemed to be traveling in darkness through an unknown, unfamiliar land whose perils, though nebulous and ill-defined, were many and real. She was old enough to comprehend perfectly what such a marriage as this would mean for her. It would entail vast and great renunciations—renunciations that she could only make for a man in whom she had perfect confidence. And when she reviewed the matter coldly she saw that she had not the requisite confidence in this man who possessed for her such an infinite and deadly attraction. He was not a faithful Catholic. His impulses for good were strong, but there was weakness in his character. He set other things before his religion. She knew that for a time perhaps, he would return under her influence to the practice of all that his Church required of him. But after-

wards, when his love grew less, when her influence over him weakened, he would surely again fall away. She felt too weak to hold him. His strength was greater than hers; she felt too pliable in his hands. That was why, she told herself, that although her heart broke she would never willingly see him again. If she saw him she must inevitably succumb at last to his entreaties and marry him. Setting aside all differences of class and outlook—sufficiently great in themselves to divide them eternally—there was this other spiritual barrier which could not be easily over-passed.

Audrey had little sleep that night. Kemp's face haunted her; his passionate words echoed in her ears; she felt again the touch of his hand. She lived again that moment when his arm had supported her, and his face was bent close to hers. She had loved him so much then that she had passionately longed to tell him that she would be his wife. No consideration for Hubert had held her back. There was only one thing that divided them, a barrier of Kemp's own making. She could never trust him, could never feel any confidence in his advice and judgment. But she had little doubt of the permanent quality of her love for him. And it had brought her only this tragedy of renunciation.

She rose early, and breakfasted alone with Mrs. Bryant whose manner was curiously cold and disapproving, although she did not again revert to Audrey's late and unexplained return to the house on the preceding night. If she had her suspicions she did not utter them. But once or twice she shot a quick, keen glance at the girl who sat there so silently, toying with her food. She was pale and heavy-eyed; she had the appearance of one who has passed through tragically emotional moments. Mrs. Bryant had no doubt at all in her mind that in some

way Audrey had traversed a sharp and bitter experience during those hours of absence last night.

A newspaper lay by the side of Mrs. Bryant's plate; she had been glancing at it when Audrey came into the room. Once Audrey put out her hand as if to take it up, but Mrs. Bryant interposed with a kindly but firm: "I think you had really not better read the paper to-day."

"Is there an account of the meeting last night?" asked Audrey.

Mrs. Bryant cleared her throat.

"Yes. You will know all about it in due time. Mr. Kemp made a most unjust and dastardly attack upon your brother."

Audrey flushed crimson, and then turned paler than before.

"If you take my advice," went on Mrs. Bryant, "you won't read it. It will only make you miserable."

Audrey rose from the table.

"I am tired, I shall go home now," she said.

"You told me last night you intended to leave Millborough," said Mrs. Bryant. "Shall you be going away soon?"

"Very soon. Perhaps to-morrow or the next day. Millborough has become—hateful to me!"

"Do not decide anything in a hurry. You were working well here—in time you would have been extremely useful to us."

"I can't do any good here. There are forces—working against me." Audrey's tone was final.

"I admit it isn't easy. But we mustn't be put off with a few difficulities." Mrs. Bryant was a good and sturdy fighter. She had fought many a battle, and had known both victory and defeat. She was hardened to blows. She had learned to enjoy a conflict, to appreciate things that did not come easily

to her hand. She wanted to imbue Audrey with a little of this keen fighting spirit.

"Hubert shall decide. But I think he will want me to go," was all Audrey said. Very soon afterwards she left the house, driving away with her suitcase in a cab.

Hubert was out when she arrived. The servants knew nothing of his plans, were unaware if he intended to return to luncheon. There was, therefore, all the long day to be lived through before she could have that interview which she so dreaded with him. For of course he must be told. She had a new horror of secrecy and deceit. She could not live in his house, cherishing unknown to him the secret of Kemp's love for her, of her own love for Kemp. He must hear the miserable story. In her present humiliation she felt that nothing could abase or humble her further. Already she was in the dust whither Kemp had flung her last night. . . .

The day was wet, and towards evening the wind increased in violence and rattled the exposed casements at the Hall. As the time for Hubert's return drew near Audrey was almost overcome with nervousness. Her old fear of him began to master her. She was not so sure that she would be able to tell him to-night. To-morrow morning, perhaps, before he went down to the Works. Then she could go away quietly. He would surely let her go now. He would know that he could not trust her any more. Her loyalty to him had been tried and had been found wanting. She loved his enemy. . . . She thought if she had lived in old violent days, when men took the law into their own hands, that Hubert might quite justifiably have killed her.

It was nearly eight o'clock when she heard the motor approaching the house. Audrey rose mechanically to her feet. She stood by the fire in her

little sitting-room. The light burnt in a carefully shaded lamp; it illuminated the room with a soft rosy effect. The carpet and curtains were of dull rose colour, the furniture was for the most part French, with polished surfaces. It was a very charming and dainty room, quite unlike anything else at the Hall. There was no crowding, and everything had been chosen with a wise discretion. Audrey had at first been very pleased with it, even proud of its quiet beauty. But now she only wanted to leave it. It had all become horrible to her, just as everything in Millborough had become horrible. *Or ci attristiam* . . . yes, and she with all the rest. She could not escape the common lot of Millborough folk. . . .

Now she could hear Hubert coming quickly up the stairs. Why was he seeking her thus, as if he refused to admit any delay? The thought came to her then that perhaps he already knew. . . . She might so easily have been recognized last night when she left the Town Hall with Kemp. One of those few stragglers in the narrow street might have seen her as they emerged together. Kemp was readily recognizable with his huge form, his individual, slightly slovenly gait. And Tressider's sister was well-known by sight now in Millborough. Had not Kemp said that despite her thick veil he would have known her anywhere? . . .

The door was flung open, and now Hubert stood on the threshold. The brother and sister were facing each other. Audrey knew from one glance at her brother that he was aware of at least some part of what had occurred last night. Although her limbs trembled she was unconsciously nerving herself for the scene that must now take place.

Hubert's face was dry and pale and hard and slightly wrinkled, just like an ancient piece of parchment. But his eyes were terrible. They were bright

as a polished sword, and their glance had something, too, of the sharpness of a sword. His mouth set in a thin firm line was like a neat red gash in his face. Audrey gazed at him in terror.

Then Hubert laughed, the sound was a little ghastly.

"Don't be afraid—I'm not going to hurt you," he said. "But if you were a man you'd get the thrashing you deserve."

Audrey was silent. There was a new violence in his manner. Her flesh feared him.

"Is it true that you went to the meeting with Kemp last night?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"That you stayed in a private room at the back of the platform so as to hear his infamous speech directed against myself?" He came a step nearer. "You are to tell me the truth. I forbid you to lie to me!" His voice was loud and harsh and threatening. She could understand then why men in the heat of passion sometimes murdered women.

"It is quite true. I was going to tell you. I never meant to lie to you, Hubert."

Her voice was low but quite steady. She felt a renewal of courage. She was paying the price—the full price—of those few moments of intense happiness when Kemp had assured her of his unchanging love. She would not have altered anything if she could, although for one terrible moment she had believed that Hubert would lose all control and strike her to the ground.

"You went down to Millborough—pretending you were going to do good work—on purpose to hear him speak?" he demanded.

"No, I did not go down on purpose. I met him last night—he asked me to go with him."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In Green Row. At Mrs. Davy's."

"Although I forbade you to go anywhere alone last night?"

"Yes. Someone had to go—the baby was ill. And while I was there, helping to boil the milk, he . . . came in."

"Go on," said Hubert, in a commanding tone.

"He said he would walk back to the Settlement with me, and we started together. But on the way he urged me to go to the Town Hall. We went in at a small back entrance—there was no one about. He locked the door. When it was time for him to speak he left me."

"And you heard it all—every word?"

"Every word, Hubert."

"Will you tell me why you did this?"

"He seemed to wish it," said Audrey wearily. She was beginning to feel physically exhausted.

"What difference could that possibly make to you? Why should you do what he wishes? Unless—" His eyes searched her face, and she could see that some dim suspicion of the truth had forced its way into his mind. He paused for a second and then said: "*Is* there any reason, Audrey? Are you keeping anything from me?"

"I suppose he wanted me to go because he loves me. He wished to make me understand better the kind of thing he is working for here. I am very sorry, Hubert. I did not know he was going to attack you like that."

But Hubert was not listening. The first part of her speech had whipped his anger to uncontrollable fury. "He loves you? This man from the gutter? He loves you, and dares to tell you so? And you—you have dared to listen to him?"

Audrey shrank back terrified. His menacing fist was close to her face as if he longed to bring it full force against her mouth. She put up her hands

with a pitiful gesture, as if to shield herself. She felt Hubert's hand clutch her wrist with the irresistible grip of a vice. He dragged her hands from her face. She gave a low moan of pain, but she could not free her wrist from that cruel, merciless grasp.

"How dared you listen to him?" he said. "Are you going to tell me that there is any understanding between you? Do you dare look me in the face and tell me that you return the love of this scoundrel —that you felt no shame in listening to his words of love?"

"I am not ashamed to tell you that I love him. I do love him, and I have told him that I can never see him again. He knows that I can't marry him. . . ."

"Marry him indeed! I should think not! You are mad, Audrey, and until you have recovered your senses you shall have no liberty at all. You—my sister—to contemplate marriage even with this low-born, gutter-bred scoundrel! The kindest thing to think of you is that you are not quite right in your mind." He loosed his grip of her wrist, and on the white skin there were the red bruising marks of his fingers. Audrey looked at her wrist in her silence. It hurt her, and she knew that for days to come there would be the marks of those bruises.

"You shall not leave the house until I give you leave," he went on more calmly; "there shall be no meetings—no love-making behind my back. Do you understand? You are absolutely untrustworthy. You are as likely as not to go off and marry this man and bring everlasting disgrace upon our name. But if you do marry him he won't let you off so lightly as I've done. He has not long emerged from the class that comes home drunk on Saturday nights and beats its wife for a trivial offense." His tone

was ironically insolent; it brought a little flush of shame to her face.

"But I am not going to stay here, Hubert," she said, "I am going away to-morrow. It was a great mistake—my ever coming here. I am going to cut my loss. Aunt Cynthia will be back in a week or two, and till then I can live in her house. I will write to her—she'll understand. . . ."

"Do you think I am going to give you unlimited opportunities for seeing this man you profess to love? Do you take me for a fool, Audrey? You shall not leave this house until I take you up myself to put you under Aunt Cynthia's care, and tell her all that has happened. You are a minor—you have no money of your own except what your trustees choose to give you. No doubt this man is after your money. He has taken advantage of your youth to suggest marriage to you. He isn't likely to accept your assurance that you won't marry him, as final. Especially, if you have told him—as you have just told me—that you love him!" He uttered the words in a tone of profound disgust.

"He knows that I love him." said Audrey proudly.

Again she saw that ugly look of violence on Hubert's face.

"You dared to tell him that?"

"Why should I keep it from him? I am not ashamed of it," said Audrey.

"You are degraded—depraved"—he flung at her. "But you shall never marry him. My sister to marry Kemp, indeed! I would rather see you lying dead."

Audrey crossed the room, and went over to her writing-table.

"I am not going to stay here," she repeated with courage, "and you can't force me to. I'm not going to stay here another day. I shall go away to-morrow morning."

"You shall not go! You are only anxious to go so that you may meet him undisturbed. I mean to prevent anything of the kind. You shall never see him again. He isn't a fit person for you to know. You shall not disgrace our name!"

"Let me go, please, Hubert," she said. "Do be reasonable about it. You have said everything you can possibly say against Mr. Kemp and myself. But if you like I will promise you that I won't see him. . . ."

"You are reckoning without Kemp. Do you suppose he will keep away from you? No, not unless steps are taken, and I am going to take them. You do not leave this house, Audrey. Do you understand? I forbid you to make the attempt."

Audrey was silent. She had made up her mind to leave Millborough, and she knew that no threat of Hubert's could deter her from taking this course.

Hubert moved towards the door.

"I can only hope that nothing of all this will reach Dorling's ears," he said in an icy tone. "No decent man would care to be the successor of Adam Kemp. You have, indeed damaged your prospects of making a suitable marriage. It is extraordinary that a girl like you, carefully brought up and sufficiently good looking, with a little money, too, should have deliberately—almost maliciously—destroyed your prospects for the future in this way. I've done my very best to prevent your making a fool of yourself about this man. I saw when you first came that he didn't intend to leave you alone. He's had his head turned by some of the so-called smart women down here, and so he imagines that he is irresistible. You don't know his character, but I do. I don't even believe that he's really in love with you. He has been trying to persuade you that he is for some private motive of his own. It was in order to stab me

in the back, I suppose. And you lent yourself to it. You were his easy dupe. I believed, however, that I could trust you to behave like a lady. It seems I was mistaken."

While Hubert was making this long speech, his cold, insolent voice seemed to Audrey like the lashing of a little savage whip. It hurt her because he had penetrated so surely into those fears of hers—that doubt, that mistrust of Kemp which were always more keen when he was no longer with her and persuading her in soft and tender accents, of his love. The shame she had known last night when she sat alone in the little room listening to Kemp's savage arraignment of Hubert, came back to her, deepened and intensified. Shame, not that he loved her, but that he had never loved her. Else how could he have deliberately brought her thither to be tortured, as he was torturing her then, with every considered word? Hubert was to be punished through her, and if some of the hard blows fell upon her, what did Kemp care? And then he had returned, his eyes aflame with triumph because his words had kindled the fierce wrath of two thousand men out there in the great hall. But he had not come to speak of his triumph. He had come back to tell her that despite all things he loved her, and wished to marry her. Only she must not marry him in ignorance. That was what he had told her. But now Hubert's words revived that old sense of passionate distrust.

"Whatever you say can make no difference now," she told him, "we shall never see each other again. I have told him so. And some day I think you will be sorry for all the cruel things you have said to me to-night."

She passed him slowly, and went out of the room without another word.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE VANDOMS AT HOME

VANDOM was in what his wife called "one of his moods," and at such moments she was wont to tremble for the safety of anything that happened to be breakable in the room. The breakfast-table at Reddell Park was the scene of the domestic disturbance, and only Sonya and Binny were present, besides the irascible master of the house. Evangeline Standen who had been staying with them during the electoral campaign at Millborough, and had been making free use of their motor cars for a purpose of which her host most strongly disapproved, was breakfasting in her own room. She disliked meeting Vandom at that hour of the morning.

Signs of wrath had been visible even before the man servant had come in with the *Millborough Gazette* and laid that offending newspaper beside Mr. Vandom's plate.

"These eggs aren't fit to eat! Sonya, why can't you tell the cook to see that only fresh eggs are sent to the table? You are gadding about everlastingly, morning, noon, and night, and you never think of the servants at all. You let everything go to rack and ruin! Binny, if you cram your mouth like that I'll take you out of the room and teach you manners! Don't answer me, sir!" He picked up the paper and glanced with much rapidity at the headlines. Suddenly he crumpled it up and flung it across the room. Binny, who was always rendered nervous by his father's outbursts of temper, gave a hysterical laugh, whereupon Vandom rose from his seat and boxed the boy's ears soundly. Binny howled, and his mother, rising with perfect calmness led him to the door; her arm lying lightly round his neck.

"Go up to the schoolroom, darling. I'll come as soon as I can. And don't cry any more," she whispered, imprinting a consoling kiss on the injured cheek. Then she returned and took her seat at the table as if nothing had happened.

Vandom said angrily: "You are encouraging that boy to rebel against me—the moment I punish him for insolence you take his part and kiss him! He wants a good thrashing and you know it—he's the most ill-conditioned little cub that ever lived."

"I'm not going to have Binny knocked about just because you happen to be in a vile temper about something else," said Sonya. "The child was doing no harm—you frighten him till he becomes hysterical, and then you think he's laughing at you."

She drank her coffee with great composure.

"The whole country is going to the dogs!" pursued Vandom wrathfully, returning to his original grievance, "the account of the meeting last night is a perfect disgrace! Kemp made a most libelous speech in which he said everything he could to destroy Tressider's credit in the town. To his own workmen, too! And when it comes to a man taken straight from the gutter, criticizing his betters and daring to contest the seat, the sooner we clear out of such a neighbourhood the better!"

"It's a good thing Evangeline is not here to hear you," said Sonya, "she was canvassing for him all day yesterday and she attended the meeting. She said it was the most wonderful triumph for Kemp you can possibly imagine. He stirred them up to a perfect frenzy of excitement and anger."

"Then you can tell her that if she wants to continue canvassing for this gutter-candidate she can do it from some other house! She shall not have my motor for the purpose any more. She has been

pretending to me ever since she came that she was taking no part in politics at all."

"You can hardly complain of her going to the meeting when Mr. Tressider's own sister was there," said Sonya.

"Tressider's sister there? Impossible! You won't get me to believe that, Sonya, however anxious you may be to shield Miss Standen. Tressider wouldn't be likely to let her go—he hates the man, and he is most particular about his sister—he hardly lets her go anywhere. And think of the scandal it would make if she were to be seen at a meeting when Kemp was to speak. We all knew there would be an attack on Hubert, but this is the most low-down thing I ever read."

"Audrey Tressider was there," repeated Sonya, "Evangeline told me that she saw her. Of course she was hidden away somewhere, but when the meeting was over Evangeline saw Kemp and a woman walking down a street at the back of the Town Hall as she drove away. She is certain that the woman was Audrey. She could not see her face, but she was of the same height and shape. Besides, Kemp knows so few people about here. He has always been attracted by Miss Tressider—it would be such a triumph for him if he were to get hold of her—and I know Beatrice Grazebrook hoped that it would happen as the most effectual means of detaching him from Evangeline."

It was Vandom's day for going to London, and it was with a sigh of relief that his wife saw him now rise hurriedly from the table. When she had heard the front door slam abruptly after him followed by the sound of a motor going down the drive, she went upstairs to her guest's room.

Evangeline was in bed, very charmingly arrayed in a pink silk peignoir, with her red hair lying loosely

upon her shoulders. She was immersed in the *Gazette* and could hardly look up to greet Sonya.

"My dear Sonya," she said, after carrying her eye to the end of the paragraph, "you have always taken the absurd line of thinking that I attached too much significance to Kemp. But I should never be surprised if he became our first great Labour statesman! He is a man of the people and so he has the people's confidence, and his speech last night was the most eloquent thing I've ever heard. He looked like a magnificent prophet delivering a message of doom."

"Well, you are not to help your prophet any more from this house," said Sonya, sitting down near the bed and glancing perfunctorily at the paper. "Percy is disgusted at the thought that anyone from here should have assisted him either by attending the orgy last night or even by doing a little canvassing. He's in such a bad temper this morning that I strongly advise you not to risk meeting him again. I will drive you over to Abbot's End this afternoon, as you say that Lady Ince wants you to stay with her."

"How intensely disagreeable of Percy!" said Evangeline.

"Well, for once in a while he happens to be right," said Sonya, "I mean the speech last night was frankly libelous, and we don't want to be mixed up in anything of that kind. We are rather new people here, my dear Evangeline, and as we live here and you don't, we would rather you migrated to a more congenial environment."

Sonya Vandom could be decided if she chose. She believed with her husband that Kemp had gone too far last night. Vandom had also certain industrial interests in Millborough, and the prevalent unrest would certainly spread among his men if

this kind of thing were permitted to go on unchecked.

Sonya's admiration for Kemp was a thing of the past. His present mission seemed to her repulsive. As a poet she had admired him with that keen *flair* she possessed for what was genuinely beautiful and valuable in art, literature, and music. But as a politician, she found him a strenuous, fatiguing, disagreeable person.

"In any case I am not going to canvass for him any more," said Evangeline. "Kemp hasn't learnt how to say 'thank you,' yet. He knows perfectly well that I stretched a point in going to the meeting last night—I don't believe there was one single soul I know in the room. But I went to hear him speak—to give him courage—" She was determinedly blind to the slight sarcastic movement of Sonya's lips. "And yet when it was over he never came near me. He never returned to the platform at all, but hid himself away in some little den behind the scenes. I believe that Audrey was concealed there, too. I'm certain I saw her in the street outside with him."

"Percy refuses to believe it," said Mrs. Vandom, "he says what we all know to be the case that Hubert never lets her go anywhere. He keeps her quite shut up at the Hall. Do you suppose you and Miss Tressider are the only women he knows? He must have a furious success among the ladies of his own *ambiente*."

"He might have come"—said Evangeline discontentedly, "there was a frightful crush outside, and everyone was booing and yelling and hissing and cheering. You never heard such a noise—it was positively frightening. I wonder if all poor people are as odious as the Millborough ones?"

"I thought you liked them so much," said Sonya. "Be honest, Evangeline, and say that you are upset

at Kemp's behaviour, and a little jealous, too, of his unknown female friend! I wish I could ask you to stay, but Percy is in such a bad temper I don't like to risk it. He hit Binny quite hard at breakfast."

"I am sure that Binny richly deserved it!"

"He did nothing of the sort!" Sonya's eyes flashed. "And I'm not going to have him made into a whipping-boy."

"It's absurd for you to blame me, Sonya, because Binny's ears are boxed."

"Percy wouldn't have done it unless he'd been beside himself with anger—he really hardly notices Binny at other times."

Last night had been a bitter disappointment to Evangeline. She had longed for some recognition from Kemp in the hour of his supreme triumph. She had helped him, worked for him, incurred the wrath of her relations and friends for him, and he had utterly forgotten her. He had marched on to the platform, and had never once glanced towards the little gallery where she was sitting with a few secret sympathizers, some of whom had indeed come more from curiosity than from any other motive. Kemp had known perfectly well where she was. She could see him still—with his small, beautiful head flung back, his gigantic, rather unwieldly body that possessed at least the splendour of physical strength, the dark hair worn rather long with one lock that fell perpetually into his eyes, and had to be brushed back with a free, familiar gesture that enchanted her. She had been thrilled, as never before, by the sound of his voice. The applause had sounded like some mighty thunder rolling through the Hall. She had thought it would never cease.

But while it was abundantly clear to her that Kemp had had no thought for her, it had never occurred to her until afterwards that he had been

preoccupied by the presence of some one else. She was certain now that it was Audrey whom she had seen for a second as she drove away, Audrey standing there close to Kemp in the quiet, deserted street, Audrey whom she could never have imagined anywhere else at that hour but in the quiet seclusion of the Hall. How had she escaped from Hubert's vigilance, come down here, listened to the fiercest, most eloquent, and most violent attack upon her brother that had ever been made? It was Audrey's presence then that had stimulated him to an eloquence to which he had never before attained. . . .

Evangeline rose and dressed herself when Sonya had departed, but she was in a ruffled mood. "I shall never come here again," she thought to herself. "Fancy being almost told to go away by that little bounder Percy. And Sonya would make a holocaust of all her dearest friends rather than run any risk of Binny's getting what he wants more than any boy I've ever seen."

Still, it would be a relief to go to Abbot's End. Lady Ince was so intimate with the Tressiders that one was sure to hear exact and reliable information about them at her house. She never gossiped, but it was always easy to ascertain at least something of their movements from her. And Evangeline had her own motive for wishing to hear definite and circumstantial news of Audrey. If she had really been present at the meeting the fact would inevitably spread like wild-fire from end to end of Millborough, and Lady Ince would be certain to hear of it and also to know its precise effect upon Hubert.

"It was a jolly plucky thing to do if she really did go," mused Evangeline, as she leaned her charming face towards the mirror and gave an extra touch of crimson to her lips, a little more powder to her nose. "But somehow I can hardly believe it of her.

Beatrice says she's chatteringly afraid of Hubert. Still if she did go it shows that her admiration for Kemp is even stronger than her fear of Hubert, and anyhow it was very unusual and dramatic."

"I really think if Wanford were to come and propose to me to-day I should accept him," was her next comment to the charming face in the mirror. "I'm sick of Kemp—one never knows quite where one is with that sort of person. And Sonya was really rather insolent this morning. I shall be glad to get away from here."

And she would not be utterly banished at Abbot's End, it was sufficiently near to enable her to keep an eye, so to speak, on Millborough.

CHAPTER XXX

"THEY WOULD NEVER FORGIVE ME"

MRS. CORBY was immensely perturbed when she received a letter from Hubert Tressider giving her a brief outline of the recent happenings at Millborough. She had not been without anxiety, for Audrey's letters had been for some time past, short and unsatisfactory. Reading between the lines she felt certain that her niece was not happy, although paradoxically, she did not seem to have any wish to leave Millborough immediately. Mrs. Corby's anxious dissatisfaction had induced her to cut short her stay abroad, and return to England nearly a fortnight before she originally intended. She had therefore arrived in London only two days after Hubert's letter had reached her at Cannes.

She sent a telegram to Audrey: *"Am back, come as soon as you can."* This relieved her feelings, and then she sat down and re-read Hubert's letter which had given her such abundant cause for misgiving.

"I cannot tell you how this astonishing duplicity on Audrey's part has grieved me. I had forbidden her ever to see or to speak to Kemp. I blame Lady Ince more than I can tell you for bringing them together last Christmas, no doubt, for some excellent Catholic motive, which, naturally, does not appeal to a heretic like myself. I gave Audrey permission to sleep at the Settlement on the night of the political meeting here, as I was dining in Millborough myself. I told her not to go out alone, as I imagined there would be a row in the town that night. Kemp met her at one of the cottages and took her to the meeting, on purpose presumably, that she should hear him abuse me. I believe he hid her in his private room. I suppose they thought

they would not be discovered, but it is not easy to keep anything secret in Millborough, and I heard rumours of it on the following morning. When I returned home in the evening I charged her with it, and I will say this for her, that she made no attempt to deny it. I expressed myself very frankly, and she replied in a manner that confirmed my worst fears. Not only has she imbibed some of the worst poison of this man's teaching, but she actually informed me that he had told her he loved her. I consider that her mood was highly hysterical, so I attach but little importance to her confession that she also loved him in return. Kemp had previously on various occasions tried to render her conspicuous by his attentions; it was done I believe partly to annoy me, and partly to try to win her over to his way of thinking. His success with Miss Standen has evidently turned his head, and encouraged him to believe himself irresistible, despite his low birth and breeding. Instead of being shocked and repelled by his vulgarity and something extraordinarily low and repulsive about the man's appearance and way of speaking, Audrey seems to have been actually fascinated by him, and to have lent herself quite willingly to the little intrigue. All Millborough is ringing with the exploit to-day, so I am not allowing Audrey to leave the house. Directly you return I shall send her back to you, and I do implore you to use your influence and authority to prevent her from ever setting eyes on this gutter-bred scoundrel again."

Had Mrs. Corby not been on the point of leaving Cannes when this letter reached her it is certain that she would have at once made preparations for departure. Although she did not quite believe Hubert's story, especially as regarded this supposititious love of Audrey for Kemp, there was quite enough

to render her extremely anxious. If it were indeed true that Audrey cared for Kemp . . . but no, the thought was too horrible. Hubert had been blinded by anger . . . it was impossible that Audrey, delicately nurtured and carefully educated, should have fallen in love with such a man. It was, of course, very foolish and unwise of Lady Ince to bring them together, but no doubt she had had, as Hubert suggested, an excellent Catholic motive for doing so. She was an ardent soul-hunter, and Mrs. Corby had always rather admired this trait in her, still she did not want her own niece to join in the quest when the quarry was a Kemp.

It was not six months since Audrey had left her house to go to Millborough, and already matters had come to a crisis which would certainly destroy all hope of the brother and sister ever living together again. Hubert was exasperated, disappointed, and furious with Audrey. Of Audrey's attitude she knew nothing, but she felt sure that the girl must have passed through a period of intense mental suffering. Hubert would not in any way have lightened the load for her. Such an episode must have brought out all the most cruel and least merciful characteristics that he possessed. If it had been possible she would have gone to Millborough that very evening to fetch her niece away. But this being impossible she contented herself with telegraphing to Audrey. Her letter to Hubert, posted that same night, was guarded and non-committal. "I feel sure," she wrote, "that your intense dislike of Kemp, and the fact that he is not only a personal but a political enemy, have led you to exaggerate quite unconsciously poor little Audrey's indiscretion. Since, however, people are as you say talking, it will be best for her to come to me at once. She knows how more than welcome she always is."

Nearly a week intervened between the night of the meeting and the arrival of Mrs. Corby's telegram. Audrey spent that week at Millborough Hall, and however limited her past freedom had been, it was liberty itself compared to the present conditions that existed. No gaoler could have watched her more vigilantly and more suspiciously than Hubert did. His distrust of her was complete, and he showed it in all his words and actions. She was not allowed to leave the house except to take a walk in the garden. But she had no wish to go out, and her dread of meeting any chance acquaintance was too great to permit her to rebel against Hubert's decree of isolation. She saw no one except her brother, and then only at meals, when a desultory conversation was kept up between them as long as the servants were in the room. Afterwards they both relapsed, as if by common consent, into silence.

Some days later Audrey learned that Hubert had after all been successful; he had won the seat by about forty votes. As Mr. Smith had been returned without opposition at the last election Hubert's political enemies had some grounds for rejoicing in their moral victory. But when Audrey first heard the news her thoughts flew not to Hubert but to Kemp. The result would, of course, be the bitterest disappointment to him. He had worked hard, and she knew that he had felt certain of success.

She had had no word of him since their parting on that eventful night. Yet she had not believed that he would take his dismissal as so final. She had thought, nay hoped, that he would have written. His silence was a very bitter thing to her. Hubert's words had been terrible, stabbing her like swords, but the worst pain lay in her slowly growing conviction that she had only been a tool in Kemp's hands, that she had mistaken in her blundering igno-

rance both the man and his motive. That inveigling of her to the meeting had only been the last, the final expression, of his hatred for Hubert.

The April days were wet and stormy, and she could make plenty of excuses for remaining indoors. She was standing at the window one afternoon, looking out at the drenched garden and at the thin black film of smoke that hung eternally over Millborough, when she heard a childish voice calling to her from below.

"Miss Tressider, are you busy, or may I come in for a chat?"

Binny Vandom was standing in the drive. He had just dismounted from his bicycle.

"Yes, I'll come down and let you in."

She had been so lonely these last few days that she was cheered even by the prospect of talking to Binny. Audrey was very fond of children, but she had more than once thought that Binny was the least attractive specimen of childhood she had ever known.

She went down to open the door and discovered him standing there on the mat, his fat white face somewhat flushed with exercise, and his black hair hanging stickily beneath the cap which he now hastily removed.

"Come up to my sitting-room, Binny, and we'll have tea."

"That'll be simply topping," said Binny. "And I've got something very important to bring you. But you musn't say I brought it or I shall get into a row."

He followed Audrey upstairs, and when the door was shut he took a letter from his pocket and handed it to her with an air of mystery. Audrey had never seen the writing before, but she felt certain that it was Kemp's. She looked at Binny and said:

"But how did you get hold of this, Binny?"

"In Millborough," said Binny, "I went in on my bike—Mummy always lets me when Dad's away, and he's been in London for several days. We're always glad when he isn't there."

"Hush—you musn't speak like that of your father."

"Why shouldn't I? Mummy does. But anyhow I should catch it if he knew I'd seen Mr. Kemp. He hates him you know, and he made Miss Standen go away because he said he wouldn't have her canvassing from Reddell. She's gone to Lady Ince's, and she isn't going to canvass any more. I hear everything that goes on, you know. They discuss it all in front of me," added Binny proudly.

"But you shouldn't repeat it," said Audrey.

"Do read your letter," said Binny, after reflecting for a moment upon this advice and then rejecting it as an impossible counsel, since his parents were in the habit of questioning him closely and severely as to all he had done and heard during the day.

"Mr. Kemp gave me that letter for you and said that I must come up here and give it to you, but that I wasn't to give it to anyone else. I promised to tear it up if you weren't here."

His big, lustreless eyes watched Audrey as she opened it with fingers that slightly trembled. It contained only a few words, hurriedly written.

"Dear Miss Tressider: I hope Binny will prove a trusty messenger. I have written twice, but my letters have been returned unopened. Rumour says you are leaving Millborough. I must see you before that dire event occurs. I have been defeated as you know. I shall be in the road beyond your field at half past six this evening. If you come you will find me there. So what can I say except . . . *Come!* Yours, Adam Kemp."

She had not known until then how great had been her need to hear of him, to see him. This assurance that he had not forgotten, that he still remembered, gave her a sense of joy that almost made the past pain seem worth while. In her great gladness she could have wept, but Binny's presence and undisguised curiosity prevented any manifestation of emotion.

"Binny, I'm sure you can keep a secret, so you won't say that you brought me this letter? Several people here are very angry with Mr. Kemp, and they would be still more angry if they thought he'd written to me."

"All right—I'll try to remember. But I shouldn't say anything to Dad in any case—he'd be so mad at my going to Mr. Kemp's rooms. He'd probably lick me if he found it out." Binny spoke cheerfully, but his face showed a certain uneasiness. Vandom on rare occasions could be very violent with his little son.

"You see, I've been very especially naughty today in going to see Mr. Kemp," continued the boy. "Mummy told me I'd better not, because Dad's so furious about his speech. Still I'm glad I went—I could see he wanted to send you that letter. Is he in love with you? Mummy and Miss Standen were talking about you the other day, and Mummy said she thought he was."

"Binny, I won't let you stay another moment if you talk such nonsense. It was very nice of you to bring me the letter, and I hope you won't get into a scrape over it, but you mustn't say things like that."

"All right," said Binny. "Still I shouldn't be surprised. That day at our party he looked and *looked* at you. I like Mr. Kemp—I don't care what people say about him. I think he's a good sort. You like him too, don't you, Miss Tressider?"

"I'm not going to answer questions like that," said Audrey.

Tea was brought in, and Binny did full justice to the bread and jam and large slices of plum-cake which had been provided for him. He was a greedy child, and this was one of the faults that his father tried to cure while his mother laughingly indulged him, permitting him to eat as much as he liked. As the husband and wife drifted further and further apart the boy became an established *casus belli* between them. His father was as blind to his good qualities as Sonya was to his bad ones. She always laughed at the unchild-like precocity which aroused Vandom's unspeakable wrath.

"I'm going away forever next week, Binny," said Audrey, when tea was over and the boy got up to depart.

"I was afraid you were going to," said Binny. "Mummy told Miss Standen she was sure Mr. Tressider would send you away. Why? What have you done?" His large eyes were fixed upon her with a scrutinizing curiosity.

"I'm going away because I want to," said Audrey. "I shall go back to my aunt. She's always wanted me to live with her in London."

"Does Mr. Kemp know?"

"Yes, I think he does."

"I expect he's sorry, too," said Binny, thoughtfully. "Well, I must push off now."

He lifted up his face and Audrey kissed him.

"Good-bye. Perhaps you'll come to see me in London."

"I'd simply love to. Well, good-bye—you'll hear of my being had up for furious riding!"

He rode off, and Audrey watched him as he went swiftly down the drive and out of the gate. Once he turned, lifted his cap and waved it to her, and then was lost to sight behind the high wall.

Left alone, Audrey sat down and re-read Kemp's letter. At first she told herself that she would make no effort to see him—the risk was too great, and nothing could come of such a meeting. She wished, however, that he had not suggested it. The very suggestion unsettled her. And perhaps this once—just for the last time—there would be no harm in seeing him. There had been something urgent in that message, something that told her that at least his anguish had been as great as her own. . . .

Towards six o'clock her thoughts began to dwell upon that solitary figure pacing the narrow lane alone, waiting for her until it was so late that hope must needs perish. . . . She could not fail him thus. He might have something important to tell her. And it would be the closing scene. Over and over again she assured herself of that, as if to silence those scruples of conscience that would have held her back.

It was dusk when she went out into the garden and crossed the field beyond the orchard, where the fruit seldom ripened. Once or twice she glanced back at the house, but there was no sign of life, and at this hour it was safe to suppose that Hubert was still busy down in Millborough. She was a little early, and she hoped that she would not have to wait long. Waiting would destroy something of that high courage with which she had started forth upon the little adventure.

There was a gate, always kept padlocked, that led from the field into the lane beyond. Against this gate a figure leaned, motionless, expectant. It was Kemp. . . .

Audrey came so softly across the grass that he was unaware of her presence until she was quite close to him. Then he turned his head suddenly and put out his hand. Their hands met across the top of the gate. Kemp, standing on slightly higher ground,

stood looking down upon her with a strange, troubled expression in his face.

"So you have come," he said. "Binny brought you the letter?"

"Yes. I gave him tea, and then he went home."

"I'm glad you've come," said Kemp. "I had a mad idea of calling. But I knew they wouldn't admit me. Tressider knows?"

"Yes. He knows everything," said Audrey.

"And you're to go?"

"Yes. My aunt will be back soon—she may come sooner on my account—we haven't heard yet. I want to go—I can't stay here."

"I am going to leave Millborough, too," said Kemp. "I am not going to fight any more. You said once—do you remember—that there were better things to be done than those I was trying to do, better ends to work for. I am not saying this just because I've been defeated by Tressider. I've been thinking of it for some time past—since last Christmas to be exact. But I was determined to finish here first, and now you see I am free. *Free!*" He lifted his face as if to feel the rush of strong cold wind blowing against it from the distant Irish Sea. "When I first heard the result I was glad and not sorry. I saw that something had been wanting to my work. . . . Perhaps you will agree with me that I *had* to be defeated."

She said quietly:

"I am glad you see that, too."

"It was you who taught me." His voice was low, and in it she detected a passionate tenderness. "I tried to teach you, you know. And instead you taught me, to love you—and so much besides." . . .

"You must not speak like that."

"This once," he said. "Why did you make me care? Yes, you did, and now your doors are closed

against me. And I love you." He put out his hand and took hers, holding it in his while he looked at her and continued speaking.

"I am not of your world," he said, "and so, perhaps, you will say that I have no right to love you, or at least to speak of it to you. My position made it presumptuous. But I love you, Audrey, and since we may never see each other again I must tell you so." The words thrilled her, and across the tense silence that followed them she could almost hear her own heart beat.

Love and pride fought then a mighty duel in her heart. But he was right—just as Hubert was right. He was not, as he had just said, of her world. He must go away, and surely she would learn to forget. The bitterest griefs are those which our hearts forbid us to remember. Stray words that she had read once floated back to her mind:

Yes, so I bid thee go—
I'll take my memory from its golden frame
And give it up to God. I shall not think of thee,
For when I may it will mean I love thee not. . . .

"And you have nothing to say to me?" he said at last, looking at her as a hungry man might eye food.

"Try to believe that I never thought this would happen. I used to think you only wanted to win my help—away from Hubert. I did not think . . . you would care for me." . . .

"Has no one ever told you how beautiful you are?" he said, harshly.

Audrey was silent. Once, she could remember wondering if Kemp thought her beautiful. But it did not seem to matter now. She was as one gazing into a black, formless gulf—the long, long future,

without Kemp, without sight or sound of him. . . . Had she the courage to send him away? . . .

"Whatever you hear of me in the future," his voice was saying, "I want you out of your pity and your charity to remember me . . . to judge me—as I have seemed to you. Perhaps I should like you best to remember me as you knew me at Abbot's End. . . ."

"Yes," she acquiesced.

But his control had come to an end.

"Audrey—Audrey—don't send me away like this! Be my wife—you shall never regret it. There are other worlds except this little petty one of ours! We could go away—to the Colonies—you haven't anyone so very near." . . .

"I have Ninian," she interrupted.

Ninian must never return to find her gone. She must always be where she could see Ninian. In his letters he often spoke of the "good times" they would have when he returned.

"They would never forgive me," she said, "and I am afraid, too, for myself—of wanting some day to go back . . . and of finding the doors all shut."

"If you were my wife, Audrey, I should not care if all the doors in the world were closed against me forever."

"I must go now—it's getting late," said Audrey. She moved a little as if she were going to leave him. But he stopped her.

"You must pray for me," he said.

"Yes, always."

"And perhaps—from time to time—you will write to me?"

"Yes."

"I'm not going to ask for your friendship when I want your love. Still, you can think of me—as a friend—can you not?"

"Yes."

"I love you," he said again, "and I know that in your heart you love me too. You have told me so, and to-day I know it. That was why you came—it wasn't only because of your beautiful kindness and sympathy. But you are too young—your love isn't strong enough . . . I see that, and I see too that it must be so. You are thinking of your brother—of a hundred other things. It's only natural." . . . His burning eyes rested upon her face. "But I am glad to know that—such love as you have to give—was given to me. I shall carry that knowledge away with me."

She was silent again, repressing her tears with difficulty. She had the feeling that she was rejecting something deeply precious, something of infinite worth. . . .

Then she turned away and hurried across the darkening field back to the house. Kemp stood there, watching her till she was lost to sight in the shadows that deepened around her. . . .

CHAPTER XXXI

WITH MRS. CORBY AGAIN

MRS. CORBY always retained a very vivid impression of Audrey's return from Millborough towards the close of a beautiful and spring-like April day.

Knowing that she was coming back because her life at Millborough had been a failure, knowing too that she must have been desperately wounded by the events that had marked it, she almost dreaded seeing her niece again. She would need comfort, and that Mrs. Corby was ready to give. But perhaps all the comfort that would be required of her was silence. Audrey was sufficiently like her father to share his disposition to hide her griefs and failures.

When the door opened and Audrey came into the room the change in her was very apparent. It was not that she looked thinner and older but that the very freshness of her beauty seemed to have fallen under some eclipse. There were shadows under her eyes, and her skin was less brilliant. She ran up to her aunt, put her arms round her neck, and kissed her.

"It's very good of you to let me come back, Aunt Cynthia. Especially with such a bad character as Hubert must have given me."

She spoke lightly, but there was no gaiety in her voice and look, and through her words ran a little bitter sound that jarred on Mrs. Corby. It was as if Audrey were on the defensive with her. It gave her a sharp insight into her recent relations with Hubert.

"And since when do you accuse me of taking Hubert as seriously as all that?" she inquired.

Audrey felt the kindness of the words; they almost melted the hardness that had invaded her heart, freezing it.

"Most people take Hubert's view of all that happened," she said rather more seriously.

"I must know full details before I can take any view at all," said Mrs. Corby. "I am not inclined to think badly of you, my dear child. We'll begin on that basis I think, and you need not tell me anything you don't wish to."

A very strange look came into Audrey's eyes.

"I expect I shall end by telling you—nearly everything," she said, taking her aunt's hand in hers. With a sudden affectionate impulse she raised it to her lips. "Do you know what a dear you are?" she demanded.

Mrs. Corby was touched. She knew quite enough of the facts as related by Hubert to feel that Audrey had certainly been guilty of an indiscretion. She looked, too, as if she had recently passed through a tragic experience that had destroyed something of her youth, and had given her the aspect of a much older woman. Whatever her feeling for this man Kemp had been, it was certain that she had been hurt by the process of initiation which she had received at his hands. He had lifted the curtain too roughly perhaps—had shown her realities that bewildered and confused her outlook. . . . But that she could have imagined herself to be in love with him, Mrs. Corby refused to believe.

"If it is only the means of bringing her ultimately to Myles," was Mrs. Corby's unspoken thought. Much depended, she was aware, upon Audrey's exact attitude towards Kemp. Given that Hubert had grossly exaggerated the importance and danger of

the situation, it was evident that there must be still some slight foundation of truth in his story.

Audrey rose restlessly and went to the window. The sky was shadowed by large violet-coloured clouds that streaked it horizontally. Breaking the sombre purple there was the slim shining sickle of a young moon. Outside in the square, a light green mist lay like a bloom upon the lilac-trees.

"I'm going to bury Millborough," came the voice from the window. "I don't suppose it will lie very deep at first, but you must help me to put some thick, heavy earth over its grave."

Mrs. Corby could hardly tell whether she were in jest or not. But the words sounded bitter—too bitter for a girl scarcely more than twenty.

"My dear Audrey, I'm sorry you should have to begin digging graves so early. Still I quite agree that if something has to be forgotten and had better be forgotten, one must lose no time in putting it out of sight."

But Audrey hardly heeded her. She seemed fantastically to be looking into Kemp's face, that strange face with the sombre heavy-lidded eyes, the straight sweep of black hair with the one lock that fell over his forehead and had so continually to be swept back with that gesture she had learnt to love. She roused herself with an effort. Had she not resolved never to dream? . . .

"Oh, Aunt Cynthia!" she said suddenly, "this is home—Hubert's house never felt like home to me. I was just a little intruding school-girl who upset everything and had to be expelled."

The false note had gone from her voice now, she was the old Audrey, but tears were not far off.

"You must be worn out," said Mrs. Corby compassionately. "Six months of Hubert would have worn me to a shadow, though I can see his good

qualities, which I am afraid you are unable to do just now. So I must congratulate you upon having survived."

"If it had only been Hubert—" Audrey said, and then stopped short.

Mrs. Corby's worst fears were confirmed. She felt assured now that Audrey loved Kemp, and that she had deliberately turned away from that love and was trying, as she expressed it, to bury it. Whatever had passed between them, she had been deeply hurt, and Hubert's anger had only been a slight and perhaps irritating addition to the general catastrophe.

"She loves him," she thought to herself, "and she sees how hideously impossible it would be for her to marry him, and so she is teaching herself to turn away from that love."

And if the intense desire to destroy this love almost at its birth were an abnormal, almost an unnatural thing, it was also, to Mrs. Corby's thinking, inevitable under the circumstances. There must be elements of shame and shrinking bound up in that love for a man who stood so far below her in worldly station, who was so severed from her by environment and education, that would no doubt help her in this fierce little effort to put him resolutely out of her life. For the rest, Time would no doubt carry those alms for oblivion in his proverbial wallet, for her as for all other human sufferers.

Afterwards Audrey told her a good deal of all that had passed between them. She drew Kemp honestly, and she was honest too about herself and the strange passion of devotion he had been able with a word to evoke in her heart. It was when he was not there that this sentiment lost something of its violence, and this admission made Mrs. Corby

more than ever resolved to keep her niece, as far as possible, out of his way.

Those months in London passed before Audrey's eyes like a fitful pageant that made no kind of impression upon her memory. All the time she had the feeling that she was waiting—waiting for fate to make another move in the game.

But when the blow fell it came from quite another quarter. . . .

It came, as most bad news comes, in a telegram. Mrs. Corby received it, read it through several times before she could grasp its significance, and even then wondered if she were not dreaming. It was from Myles Dorling to tell her that Ninian had died of fever. He begged her to break the news to Audrey. He himself had been ill, was slowly recovering, hoped to return home in the autumn. . . . She was too stupefied just then to wonder what difference, if any, his coming would make to her niece.

For she had watched her closely from day to day. Audrey had regained something of her former gaiety; she was looking better; her youth had returned to her. . . . How would she receive this news? Mrs. Corby feared that it might affect her resolution never to see Kemp again. The dread of being ultimately separated from Ninian had, she had frankly confessed, played a large part in her final rejection of Kemp. She had felt that nothing would induce him to forgive her for making such a marriage as that. Audrey had clearly seen the impossibility of reconciling Ninian to such a brother-in-law; he could never have liked, never even have tolerated him. Besides he had set his heart upon her marrying Myles Dorling. With Ninian's death, one great barrier would be removed between Audrey and Adam Kemp. . . .

Mrs. Corby took the telegram in her hand and went up to Audrey's room. She did not believe in "breaking" news, and she felt that her niece ought to know without delay what had happened.

"Audrey, dear, I have had news from Myles Dorling." . . . She stood there in the doorway, and something in her face made Audrey spring up and say:

"It is about Ninian? Has something happened to Ninian?"

She took the telegram hastily from Mrs. Corby's hand and read it, and as she read it she felt that during all these months of his absence she had been waiting for it. Surely she had known from the first that it was inevitable. And the sacrifice seemed to her, in that first hour of desolation, an entirely useless one. To die like that far away from home, far perhaps too from a priest; to die thus without any of the consolations of religion . . . these things made it more tragic, a harder thing to bear.

Mrs. Corby kissed her, whispered a word of comfort, and then left her alone. Audrey had not spoken a word. She still held the telegram, reading it as if determined to know its contents by heart. But when her aunt had left the room she knelt down and prayed.

Of late her prayers had seemed formless things; she had clung to them and to all the practices of her religion faithfully but blindly, as to a spar amid universal wreckage. She had received little consolation, had been aware of an aridity which was not the least thing she had had to suffer since her departure from Millborough. But now the floodgates of her heart were suddenly unlocked. She could both pray and weep. She seemed to herself like the Audrey who had never gone to Millborough, who had never seen and loved Kemp. The tele-

gram had taken her back to the days when Ninian was her whole world, to the days that belonged solely to him. The news of his death had restored to her something of her old self, as well as something of the simplicity of her former outlook. Sorrow has often the power to sweep aside complications; there is something simple and elemental in it, especially the sorrow that springs from the death of one near and deeply beloved. It asked of Audrey neither concealment nor disguise. The grief for one so young and so full of brilliant promise as Ninian was a dignified and natural sentiment, and one that she need not fear to display. But that other grief which had been gnawing her heart like a canker all these past weeks was a hurtful thing, complicated by shame and passion and self-contempt.

The death of Ninian thawed all the frozen places of her soul. In praying for him she received an immense and immediate consolation. While the knowledge of his death tore at her heart, she was in some way paradoxically grateful for an event that had suddenly restored her balance. . . . The thought of Kemp, who had no part in that old intimate life of hers, would have been an intrusion, just as his physical presence would have been an intrusion. Ninian had come back to her in some strange way, usurping his old place in her heart, ousting all rivals, and his nearness to her in the sad days that followed was as indisputable as it was inexplicable. There was a blank wall now that hid Kemp from her sight. He only seemed like part of some monstrous storm that had passed over the smooth smiling landscape of her life, ravaging it. And when she remembered how pitifully she had bowed her head before that storm, she could only feel a fresh onslaught of shame. . . .

But the news caused Kemp to break silence. He sent her a little note from the Bow Road—where he was staying with Jane at the time in order to make further plans for Rachel. The Cotswold air had not agreed with her and there was talk of sending her to Cornwall. But he did not mention his sisters in the letter, which contained only a few lines.

"I have heard your very sad news and know that you must be suffering. You will let me say how sorry I am for you, and assure you also of my prayers for the repose of your brother's soul. A. K."

It was just what any intimate, devout Catholic friend might have written, and it did serve for a few hours to bring Audrey's thoughts once more sharply into contact with Kemp. It cost her a struggle to drive him thence, to destroy the letter, and try to forget it. For the man had chosen exactly the form of condolence that would make its instant appeal to her. She accused Adam of no subtlety; in the things of the spirit he was of a child-like simplicity such as is almost invariably to be found in the Catholic born and bred. His prayers for Ninian would be united to hers. And his words showed her too that all he had told her of his aims and ideals at their last meeting had been no mere phrases, empty, meaningless, uttered in a final endeavour to win her favour. She had always found Kemp sincere on the subject of his religion, and she had never doubted him when he spoke of it. At Abbot's End last Christmas there had been something fine and valiant in his sudden submission. But she had seen and known then that he had the fatal weakness of very impulsive people. Not many days had passed before he had resumed his old courses, despite the remonstrances of Father Blake. Seen now in perspective, there was very little that

was heroic about the figure of Kemp. But he had a deadly power to fascinate when he chose, and when Audrey reflected how readily she had fallen a victim to that power her very heart seemed to burn with shame. He had gone from her, never doubting that she loved him. How indeed could he doubt it when she had made frank confession of that very love? . . .

Mrs. Corby had sold most of her inherited property in Cornwall, but she still retained for her own use a charming old Manor House at Trevore whither she always repaired for the summer months. This year she considered it advisable to go there much earlier than usual. Audrey's bereavement exempted her from all social activities, and she formed the opinion too that her niece would be happier away from London. When she broached the plan to Audrey the girl caught eagerly at the prospect.

They went to Cornwall early in May. It was a beautiful time of year, and the peace and silence of the place were very marked after the noise and bustle of London. Blue glimpses of the Atlantic showed between the trees, the apple orchards were gay with their pink, spring livery, the grass growing long in the meadows was acquiring its soft red bloom, broken here and there by drifts of silver-coloured daisies, while deep in the woods could be seen sapphire patches of bluebells. The far-off moorlands that made a warm brown line against the sky reminded Audrey of the moors above Abbot's End. The gorse on the hills was like a golden mist, and the deep woods round the Manor House were covered with a delicate film of emerald.

The wind that danced over those North Cornish hills was light and dry and had a sharp stimulating quality. In those immense pale spaces of sky the little clouds looked like skeins of fleecy wool unravelling themselves as the wind tossed them along.

The Manor House, gray, venerable, was set in deep beech-woods, gay now with the slim unfolding bracken and in sheltered spots with rhododendrons breaking into crimson bloom. The front windows, which faced southward, had an uninterrupted view of the hills and the long line of distant moorland. To the north there were those blue glimpses of the Atlantic that gave Mrs. Corby such moments of exquisite joy, for she loved the sea with all her heart, with something, too, of a poet's love for its fascinating sustained rhythm.

The village of Trevore lay about half a mile from her doors. There was a convent there, and Audrey was able to go to Mass in the nuns' chapel, a fact which Mrs. Corby had taken into consideration when she had planned the move.

"She must have everything that can possibly help her now," she said to herself.

For herself Mrs. Corby was perfectly happy pottering about the garden, sometimes in company with an ancient gardener, but more often alone. The weather happened to be beautiful that year, there was plenty of sunshine, and just enough rain, generally falling in soft showers during the night, to make an ideal state of things.

And watching Audrey covertly Mrs. Corby perceived to her satisfaction that youth was asserting its inherent right to the joyous things of life. Audrey's gay laugh struck on her ear sometimes with its old merry sound.

"It seems a strange and brutal thing to say," Mrs. Corby once thought to herself, "but I do think Ninian's death has simply saved her. It gave her a wholesome and sane sorrow to take the place of that miserable and morbid grieving after Kemp."

She began to hope in those days that the return of Myles Dorling would complete Audrey's cure. He would of necessity have to visit them, and tell

them all he could of Ninian's last days. And this intimacy springing from a common sorrow must certainly bring these two people into a closer relation. And surely when she saw him again, Audrey must perceive that Dorling was the very antithesis of Kemp. Mrs. Corby's renewed hopes were also largely based on the fact that she believed Kemp's influence to be on the wane. It had always been a false growth, owing its origin to the unusual environment to which Audrey had been exposed in Millborough. It could not live, she assured herself, in this normal conventional atmosphere. It would perish, surely if a little slowly, and then something wiser and stronger and more sane would step in to take its place.

CHAPTER XXXII

QUIET DAYS AT TREVORE

"I HEAR there is a poor woman very ill up Park's Farm," said Mrs. Corby one morning. "The rector's wife told me about her, and says she's a Catholic and some of the nuns from Trevore have been visiting her. I thought you might like to go and see her, and find out if she wants anything."

Audrey agreed with some alacrity. Not having her aunt's passion for gardening, she often found that time was apt to hang a little heavy on her hands at the Manor. But it was a peaceful life, and after the stormy period through which she had passed she was grateful for it.

Besides she knew that her solitude with Mrs. Corby would not be of long duration. Interruption threatened in the person of Myles Dorling, who was now on his way home and expected to be in England during the summer. He was to be invited to visit them in Cornwall, and when this plan was broached to her Audrey had made no demur. Of course she wished to see him, to hear all that he could tell her about Ninian. In the light of a possible husband she had long ago ceased to contemplate him. It seemed to her sometimes that that chapter of her life was closed down for ever. Mrs. Corby held a perfectly different opinion but was careful not to betray the fact. She believed that the youthful, violent infatuation for Kemp was doomed to die a natural death.

Audrey walked up to the Farm, which stood on a breezy height overlooking the sea. She climbed dusty lanes set between hedges, that were showing their spring dress of brilliant emerald. The thought

of visiting this sick woman was interesting to her. She had learnt to love the poor in Millborough, to admire their courage, their spontaneous generosity to each other, the quiet, frequent heroism of their daily life.

The farm-house stood on the top of the hill, a bleak enough place, and the few wind-bitten trees offered it but sparse shelter from the gales that swept the coast in winter. Audrey was greeted at the door by the farmer's wife, a taciturn woman of the dark Cornish type, with dark blue eyes and black hair just beginning to turn gray.

"I came up to see the poor woman who is ill here," said Audrey. "My aunt, Mrs. Corby, asked me to come."

Mrs. Corby's name was well known in the district, and to mention it was an unfailing "Open Sesame."

"She's worse to-day," said Mrs. Park, "but she'll be glad to see you, I know, miss. She don't have many visitors, but Father Jennings comes when he can."

She went upstairs and Audrey followed her, waiting on the landing while Mrs. Park went into a little room at the top of the house and spoke in a low kindly tone to the invalid. Then she beckoned to Miss Tressider to come in.

Audrey had very little experience of illness, but she knew from her first glimpse of the woman lying there, wasted and emaciated upon the bed, that she must be dying. The room was small and very clean. The white dimity curtains held a faint fragrance of lavender, and against the open window a few red shoots of a rose tree showed themselves in promise of future glory. But Audrey scarcely noticed these details. Her eyes were arrested by that supine figure on the bed. A youngish woman, deathly pale

except for the two crimson patches that burned in her cheeks, with eyes that were hollow and haggard, and yet possessing still some faint indications of past beauty. . . .

"You're very welcome, miss," she said to Audrey, who went forward and touched the feverish wasted little hand. The slight cockney accent sounded strange after the soft West-country speech of Mrs. Park.

"I hope you are feeling better to-day," said Audrey, "I've brought you a little jelly from my aunt, Mrs. Corby."

"Thank you, miss. Jelly's just what I've been wanting. Something cool—my mouth's that parched with the fever."

Audrey looked round the room and discovering a plate and a spoon she produced the jelly and gave a little to the invalid, feeding her as if she had been a child. It came into her mind then that this was the form of charity Adam most detested. He was always inveighing against the "beef-tea and blanket system," as he called it. No one, he was wont indignantly to allege, should need such assistance in that Utopian world of his imagining. But this woman seemed to appreciate the act of kindness, and after swallowing a little of the jelly she begged Audrey to put the remainder on one side for some future time. Audrey sat down near her, and the woman began to talk with that easy garrulity common to her class. And fate stood near, spinning the thread, and perhaps watching the little scene with an ironic smile.

"Haven't you anyone belonging to you here?" Audrey asked.

"No, miss, I'm from London you see—we've a house in the Bow Road where we were all brought up. Jane—that's my sister, miss—has got her work

and my 'usbin 'e ain't much good, and now I hardly know where he is. Seems 'e's left the place where we used to live. 'E's a dock 'and, miss, and can earn good money when 'e likes but 'e don't always like. And Adam—that's my brother, miss, 'e's a fine gentleman now, and though he brought me down here he can't stay."

"What is your name?" asked Audrey. The name of Adam had struck across her thoughts with a poignant familiarity.

"Todd, miss. Rachel Todd. But I was born Kemp. Maybe you've heard of my brother Adam —he knows a lot of people. He writes poetry something beautiful. Lots of ladies read it, miss, and invite 'im to their 'ouses, though you wouldn't think it to look at Jane and me. It was all along of a rich gentleman, Mr. Bartlett, sending him to Oxford and eddicating him."

Luckily Rachel required no answers to her questions; she did not again inquire if Audrey had ever heard of her brother. She went on talking, for it was seldom she had such a patient and attentive listener, one, too, whose eyes were so kind and whose voice had such lovely sounds in it. Before she went away from Park's Farm that morning Audrey had learnt a great deal about the little house in the Bow Road, much more, indeed, than Kemp had ever deigned to tell her, though he had made no sort of effort to keep her in the dark with regard to his own origin. He had no false shame about it at all; he had too large and too free an outlook for that. Rachel being naturally more communicative informed Audrey of the poverty and stress that they as children had had to endure after the death of their parents, with only Jane, brave, hard, uncomplaining Jane, of an age to work for them. Rachel was perhaps more truly grateful to Jane than Adam had ever been. He had never so completely forgiven her for the rough,

severe discipline she had meted out to the two children under her care. Adam, nervous and sensitive, had perhaps suffered more keenly under it than Rachel, who had accepted it as a grim necessity of childhood, just as later on she had submitted to being "knocked about" by Todd as one of the grim necessities of married life. She quickly passed on to the tragic story of her own marriage, of the babies that came into the world only to die. "Four of them, miss, and two of them such beautiful boys —the eldest was the image of Addie." It was a glance aside as it were, but to Audrey it was almost the most pitiful part of the tragic little story. "Jim —he's gone off, miss, since Addie said he'd make him pay something towards my keep. It frightens me when I think of it—Jim, he just hates Addie. . . ."

Audrey repressed an involuntary shudder. That Rachel could be Kemp's sister had brought to her the first really sharp sense of the reality of his humble birth. But it was all so much worse than she had expected, so much more sordid and terrible than she could ever have pictured for herself. At one time she had even woven pretty fancies about Kemp, but now these illuminating details of life in the Bow Road—the life that for so many years had been his—swept aside all her idle dreams. He was as they had said a "gutter-genius"—the gutter so admirably hidden and yet sometimes so strangely to the fore in that lack of reticence and of delicacy which early formative influences alone can give. The man was a true genius, he possessed that power which lifts a man above his fellow-men. But the past elemental suffering—the suffering engendered by penury, by want, cold, hunger and thirst, these had been his, and she could look upon him with a strange pride to think that he should have risen so

high and yet remained so simple, so unashamed of the past. . . . There was a true nobility in Kemp, of which she told herself that she had always been aware, and she believed it to be largely the result of the Catholic training he had received as a boy. In that great democracy of the Church it was given to all her sons to receive equal spiritual gifts. But because he had become negligent of spiritual things he had failed in his work, he had been found wanting. If he had clung to them faithfully how more than great he might have been! She could see in him now the tragedy of one who had been unfaithful in little things.

But this poor, patient, pathetic figure had unconsciously raised an impassable barrier between them. This was in her mind as she rose to say good-bye to Rachel.

"You'll come again, miss? It does me good to see you. . . ." There was rather a wistful note in Rachel's voice.

"Yes. I'll come very soon," Audrey assured her. Now that she was in possession of the truth she could see something in the wide brow, in the setting of those hollow eyes, that reminded her of Adam. "You don't think your brother and sister will be coming down to see you?"

"Jane'll only come if I get worse, miss. She's got her work and it's only just enough for her keep. And Addie—he'll come if I ask him, but he's a busy man, miss, and he's got fine friends—he hasn't always time to spare. Jane gets mad with him about his friends sometimes, and Adam don't like that. He was always a masterful one, was Addie. Couldn't bear to be corrected or told of his faults even when he was quite a little chap. But Jane was a rare one for keeping us both in order." She smiled faintly at the reminiscence. "They don't get on none too well, Addie and Jane!"

Audrey had purposely not told her name to the sick woman. She had come as "Mrs. Corby's niece," and she left it at that. She was afraid that Rachel might write to Adam and tell him, perhaps, of her visit, and would not that information bring him with all speed to Cornwall? She dreaded while she longed for that meeting, so assiduously withheld by fate.

"Well, Audrey, did you have a successful expedition?" Mrs. Corby asked at luncheon.

"Poor Mrs. Todd seems very ill indeed, Aunt Cynthia. She looks dying. And I felt sorry for her—she's had an unhappy life."

"Did she like the jelly?"

"Yes, very much. I must take some more when I go again. She said it cooled her parched mouth."

Mrs. Corby glanced at her niece with rapid scrutiny. The moral effect of this visit was to her amply visible in Audrey's face. She wore a tranquil happy expression; her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed. She had been taken out of herself, beyond the contemplation of those recent griefs that had threatened to devastate her young life. It was good for her to be thus brought sharply face to face with another's suffering. Mrs. Todd's presence at the farm might prove a blessing in disguise. It will be seen that Mrs. Corby's diagnosis of the situation was very far from being either a truthful or a complete one. She did not guess that for Audrey the veil of silence had been that day lifted a little, that she had come in contact with someone near and dear to Adam Kemp. . . .

And Audrey was thinking: "Shall I tell her? Ought I to tell her? I feel that I can't to-day. I must think it over."

For Rachel was obviously dying, and before long it would be necessary for both Jane and Adam to journey down to Cornwall to see her. And if Kemp

should come and meet her accidentally perhaps on the hills above the Manor House, who could blame her? And of course he would come, through the golden radiance that lay on the hills in those blue summer days, since the whole world did not seem wide enough to keep them apart. . . .

Suddenly Mrs. Corby said:

"Myles has written. He has reached Mombasa. He will be home sooner than we expected. I am glad he is able to tell me he is much better. . . ."

"When do you think he will arrive?" said Audrey.

"Not later than September even if he stays in France for a cure on his way," replied Mrs. Corby.

"Will he come here?"

"If we are still here. If not we shall see him, of course, in London."

Audrey was silent. She seemed at that moment to guess at the hope that was in her aunt's heart. And her whole soul was filled with a kind of sick angry rebellion. She could have cried out: "Not Myles! If not Kemp, then no one!" The very thought of marrying anyone else seemed to her like a base betrayal of him. Then the pale spectre of Rachel rose up before her; she heard the sweet voice with its queer little cockney accent uttering ungrammatical sentences, and a kind of passionate revulsion swept over her. She had never felt so utterly divided from Adam, and yet she was certain that she had never loved him more truly, with a love at once fierce and pitying. The thought of his sad, starved boyhood possessed her; she pictured him suffering with all his proud sensitive nature, continually thwarted, and often cold and hungry. Given all this, he had made a splendid thing of life, but she could still pray that all his best work lay yet before him—the work he was to accomplish as a loyal and devoted son of the Church. . . .

CHAPTER XXXIII

AN ENCOUNTER IN THE WOODS

MRS. CORBY was an enthusiastic gardener. She had a rose garden at the Manor of which she was justly proud. A former Tressider had made a quaint, old-fashioned pleasaunce, with trees and shrubs from most of the many lands where he had been compelled during the course of a long official career to sojourn, while enduring a passionate nostalgia for his Cornish home. It was a primly-arranged spot with gravel paths, but with its sheltered southern aspect it had proved a not unkindly place of exile for some of the more delicate aliens which had defied nature's laws and thriven there. Mrs. Corby while liking the pleasaunce had introduced many patches of spring flowers there, and just now the beds were gay with daffodils, tulips, and heavily-scented narcissi. Beyond the closely-trimmed yew hedge, product of years of patient labour, was the rose garden, and in one of these spots Mrs. Corby, if missing from the house, was almost certainly to be found.

Audrey found her there one golden May evening.

"In five weeks you won't know the place," she said, pointing to the arches where the rambler roses were beginning to show their buds. "I'm glad I shall not be in London this June. For once in my life I shall be able to watch things coming out. Unless you've done that you somehow feel that you haven't deserved the full glory!"

"It's so different from Millborough," said Audrey. "Nothing flourished there. It was as if a blight had fallen upon the land."

"I can well believe it, and I sincerely wish you had never gone there," said Mrs. Corby.

"Oh, you mustn't say that, please! It is good to . . . fail sometimes—really to fail I mean. As I failed at Millborough."

Mrs. Corby glanced at her sharply. For a long time Audrey had made no reference to Millborough; she had hoped the memory of it was losing its first sting.

"I still wish you hadn't gone there. But as you did go I think the wisest thing would be to try to forget it all as soon as possible. Are you going up to the Farm this evening?"

"Yes, I'm taking some fruit. I shan't be gone long. Mrs. Todd is so ill now I can only stay a few minutes with her."

"You must ask for everything you want for her," said Mrs. Corby kindly.

Since Audrey's first visit to Park's Farm she had hardly let a single day elapse without going up to see the sick woman. Mrs. Corby watched her now as she went slowly down the path and out of the gate.

"She is breaking her heart, poor child," she murmured, going back to her roses. "And I mustn't try to stop the process. What fools we mortals be!"

In the woods through which Audrey passed this evening the young leaves were flaunting their pale golden green in the slanting sunlight, casting soft violet shadows upon the tawny heaps of their predecessors. Audrey came presently upon a bluebell patch, a grey-blue mist, sweet with a wild fragrance. She stooped down to gather some of them for Rachel, breaking the cool, thick, juicy stalks with her fingers. About half way through the wood Mrs. Corby's property ended abruptly where a narrow road cut through the trees. Two little wicket-gates

stood opposite to each other, one on each side of the road. To the right there was a steep hill that ascended to a neighbouring port.

A man was standing in the road, his back turned to Audrey. But something in his great height, in the poise of his head, told Audrey that it was Kemp. She had no time to escape from him, for almost immediately he turned his head, as if he had heard the sound of her light, approaching footsteps. He even began to speak, saying: "Is this the way——?" when his eye fell upon Audrey, standing there above him. She leaned against the gate, her hands filled with the flowers she had gathered. They made the only patch of colour about her. She was dressed in a very plain black mourning dress, and her hat, too, was of unrelieved black. She looked to him strangely slender, and her ungloved hands were very white against the darkness of her dress.

He moved a step nearer, raising his head to look at her.

"Miss Tressider, is it really you?" he said, in a smothered tone.

"Yes." Her voice came to him then full of an almost intolerable sweetness.

"Come down, won't you?" He climbed the steep bank and opened the gate. They stood side by side. At their feet the sunlight and shadows made a moving, trembling mosaic of mauve and gold.

Kemp's face was oddly set. "Were you going to see Rachel?" he asked.

"Yes," she said again.

"You've been before?"

"Yes, often. Didn't she tell you?"

"She spoke of the young lady from the Manor. How could I dream it was you?'

"I'm glad you've come. She is very ill, you know —I think she wanted you. . . ."

"So *you* knew?" said Kemp.

"Yes, the first day. She told me . . . about you. . . ."

He winced. Still if Rachel had really told her all, with more detail perhaps than he had ever ventured upon, so much the better. She would know how great his presumption had been . . . how great his love. . . .

"You've been very kind to her, she tells me," he said, with a touch of bitterness.

"I haven't really done anything. . . ."

He paused. Then:

"Miss Tressider, I wonder why fate has brought us together again like this? But perhaps you see things more clearly now?"

There was a wistfulness in look and voice that hurt her.

"I always saw things quite clearly," she answered.

There was a long silence; the very woods seemed hushed.

Then Kemp said: "Give me those flowers."

She put them into his hand.

"They are very sweet," he said. "When shall I see you again?"

"We mustn't meet again," said Audrey; "if you are going back to the Farm now perhaps you wouldn't mind giving these little things to Mrs. Todd? She likes fruit, and just now we have quite a lot of forced strawberries."

"You wouldn't come?" he said almost humbly, "there are so many things I should like to tell you, about my present life and work."

She shook her head. "No—no—we musn't meet any more."

"You mean this is good-bye?" He came a step nearer and his burning eyes were sombre with an inward fire. "You have no one to consider now

except yourself. You are alone—what is there to keep us apart?"

She was silent, encompassed by the old magic.

"Are you so sure it is good-bye?" he said again.

"Yes," said Audrey.

He took the basket from her hand. "You know best. But I'm glad you've seen Rachel—at least there are no lies between us."

"Ah, don't," said Audrey quickly. "You know it has nothing to do with her. I've liked her—because she was your sister, and so fond of you—so proud of you. . . ." Her eyes were shining.

Strangely enough at that moment she seemed to be back in the music-room at Reddell Park, and Grazebrook was singing that final boast of a deathless, immutable, eternal love:

And neither the angels in heaven above
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Shall ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee. . . .

She felt, too, that she would always remember the faint and delicate scent of the spring woods, the fragrance of the dim grey-blue flowers that Adam now held in his hand, the cool rustle of the young golden leaves. Beyond the road in a gap of the trees stretched an empty misty pool of light—the distant sea. . . .

"I'm glad that you've made friends with Rachel. She's spoken and written of you very often, and I was mad at the thought of her receiving charity from some unknown hand. That it was yours makes all the difference. I'm not earning much now—and it's pretty hard work to keep her down here at all."

He made the confession without shame. Audrey had never somehow connected the Adam she had known with the harder forms of financial stress. That was a part of his life that happily lay behind

him, in the dim sordid past that had helped to make him the strong, independent man he was.

"But you've been such a good brother to her," she said.

"I have only done my duty. It was my duty, too, you will say, to give up the paper at Millborough—it wouldn't come into line somehow with the new kind of thing I was out to do."

"I'm glad you gave it up," she said.

"I've a little work—not much—on a Catholic paper."

His black brows were knitted, and the lines of his forehead showed more sharply and distinctly than they used to do. She felt that since their last meeting he had suffered, not only on account of their separation, but in countless elemental ways that had affected his health and spirits. He was thinner, and his clothes were shabbier. There was no doubt that he was struggling against poverty, and that his generosity to Rachel entailed self-denial. But he uttered no complaint, and although he made those small confessions to her, lifting as it were for the moment a curtain, he neither desired nor asked for pity.

"It is madness to ask for your love now," he went on, his eyes resting on her face. "You see I'm a poor man since I chucked my job at Millborough, and I've no home to offer you. I'm living for the present with my sister in the Bow Road. Living—as a poor man, Miss Tressider."

"Oh, I am sorry," she began. But he cut her short.

"You need not be sorry. I was brought up to that kind of thing—it won't hurt me to go back to it. I sometimes think I could bear it better if Jane wasn't there. But it doesn't cost much, and it helps her. I am only telling you this to show you that

since you left Millborough I have traveled a long way from you."

But she knew that in some ways he had come nearer. There was a fine spiritual strength about him now that made itself felt. He had made deliberate sacrifices, and the act of renouncement had given a new beauty and grace to his character.

She thought to herself involuntarily:

"It is I who ought to be kneeling at his feet. . . ."

Aloud she only said: "Shall you stay here long?"

"Till the end comes. Poor little Rachel," he said.

"Tell her I will come and see her very soon. She isn't alone—she has you. I know she would rather have you than anyone."

She turned away. In her black dress he thought that she looked like some mourning spring blossom. He watched her till she was out of sight, lost in the surrounding greenness.

"How is Mrs. Todd to-day?" Mrs. Corby was standing on the steps that led from garden to house as Audrey approached. The blue spring dusk was gathering in the shadows of the garden.

"I didn't see her. Aunt Cynthia—I've something to tell you."

"A confession to make?" Mrs. Corby's voice was pleasantly normal, and it chased away Audrey's reluctance to speak.

"I never told you that Mrs. Todd is Mr. Kemp's sister. I learned it the first day. I thought there was no necessity to mention it. But she is worse, and he has come—I met him in the woods this evening. I didn't know he was here."

Mrs. Corby slipped her hand in her niece's arm.

"I'm very sorry that you've seen him again. It is a curious coincidence that they should be in these parts."

"Yes," agreed Audrey. "I gave him the fruit—I asked him to take it to his sister. He's left Millborough for good, and I think he's very poor."

"Well, I hope he will soon find some congenial work," said Mrs. Corby brightly.

"He's gone back to live with his sister in the Bow Road. It must be a great trial to him."

"The Bow Road!"

"Yes—he lived there as a boy."

"You mustn't make yourself unhappy about him. . . ."

"But I do. Because you see in a sense it's my fault that he gave up Millborough and his work there. He was sub-editor of a socialistic paper. Not a paper any Catholic ought to write for, and he knew it. Now he's given it up, and he looks changed—poorer. . . ." Her voice was not quite steady.

"Well, my dear—it's all very sad, but he is a young man, he is sure to find something to do. And in any case you can't help him."

"Yes—that's the part that hurts," said Audrey. It seemed to her that she had been compelled to look upon an Adam who had failed, and failed very signally; with his brief triumphs at Millborough definitely at an end, and the new paths not yet clearly mapped out. Besides, there had been a touch of discouragement in his manner that had shown her he knew that the task before him would not be an easy one. Something of strength had gone out of him. It was the return to the Bow Road that had affected him profoundly. He had fought gallantly for a false cause. But his petty successes, both as poet and politician, were at an end. The old hard and penurious life had claimed him.

Mrs. Corby was silent. She deplored the return of Kemp just then when Audrey had appeared to be learning, in some sort, to forget him. Her grief at

the loss of Ninian had interposed itself between her and her life with Hubert at Millborough. Mrs. Corby had hoped that other saner influences would gradually obliterate the image of Kemp from Audrey's heart. But he had come back, had awakened her compassion; she could see that the ancient influence was beginning to assert itself, and the fact alarmed her.

"Oh, my dear, don't think of him," she said, kissing her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BACK IN THE BOW ROAD

RACHEL rallied unexpectedly after her relapse, and thus Adam was able to leave Cornwall very soon after his meeting with Audrey. There had been no necessity after all to send for Jane, a course which had at one time threatened to become unavoidable.

He did not see Audrey again. It was better so, he told himself, as the train wended its slow way through the Cornish woods and across the bleak Cornish landscape. He believed that in her heart she loved him, but she shrank from the sacrifices which such a marriage must entail for her. And he would just slip out of her life, scarcely leaving any impression upon it. He belonged to a period that had passed away—the unfortunate, almost disastrous time she had spent with Hubert in Millborough. Soon, possibly, she might forget him, only remembering him at rare intervals with coldness and even shame. Nevertheless, he clung passionately to the secret hope that she might in time learn to love him well enough to turn her back on a world that, since the death of her cherished younger brother, must be growing emptier for her every day. But he would not take advantage of her recent grief to resume his entreaties. He would wait. . . .

He treasured now a new memory of her in his heart—the vision of a black-clad girl standing there surrounded by the brilliant pure green of the spring foliage, carrying in her hands a nosegay of bluebells. It was quite unlike all those memories of her which he had carried away from Millborough, but it was to him an even dearer one. They had met

perhaps for the first time with no barrier of his making between them. She must have known that he had forsaken his old work for newer and better ideals. He had gone back resolutely to the practice of the simple yet compelling things of his Faith. And he was aware that he possessed a new strength —a strength that could enable him to bear all things, even the petty misery of his present life, even, if need be, the ultimate loss of Audrey. Not that he found his life with Jane, with its endless jars, an easy or smooth one. Her fretful yet domineering disposition seemed unable to forego that habit of perpetual fault-finding. Yet he knew that the money he gave her relieved her from all financial anxiety, and his presence must give her also a sense of security in case of any visit from Jim Todd, who had of late sometimes approached her with menaces, in order to obtain money. Nevertheless, Jane always behaved as if Adam were in the way, giving her extra work to do; she could never make him feel that his presence was in any sense welcome.

He returned to London a few days after his meeting with Audrey. Rachel was better, quite well enough to be left, and if another crisis supervened the doctor had promised to let him know at once. There was, therefore, no reasonable excuse for him to stay in Cornwall, and he had work waiting for him in London. But the contrast between the blithe freshness of the windy Cornish moors and the suffocating airlessness of the Bow Road, struck him with a sense almost of despair. It confirmed him in his longing to leave London, to sell the little house and take a cottage in the country where he could establish himself with Jane, and work in healthy surroundings. His present literary work was not very remunerative, but at least it was enough with his income for them to live on with care. And in

a place where there was a growing Catholic mission —so his thoughts ran—there was always work for a layman. But the difficulty would lie with Jane. He knew that she would obstinately set her face against any attempt to uproot her. The Bow Road was her home, her place, she belonged to it just as much as the dingy soot-begrimed bricks of which the house was built. And his assurance that he could write better in another environment would not influence her. Jane had neither interest in, nor sympathy for his work; to her it was simply a specious form of indolence. Work, as she comprehended it, was something a man did with his hands, that made him use his muscles and strength, something that brought the sweat to his brow and an honest physical fatigue to his limbs and back. Her ambitions for Adam had never soared much higher than the van-boy career for which she had originally designated him. This point of view, so wholly alien to his own, was a daily torment to Adam. Impossible to work in the small, dingy parlour, for if he tried to do so Jane would tramp in and out noisily as if deliberately intending to interrupt him. She had given up her arduous daily work in order to keep house for her brother, and she deprived him alike of peace and solitude. She watched him, too, with the eyes of a lynx, jealously, disapprovingly. Adam was an angel of patience, but he felt that he could not endure the petty martyrdom forever. . . .

When he arrived back from Cornwall Jane welcomed him without enthusiasm.

"Well, Addie, how's Rachel?"

"I left her better. At first she was very ill—we hardly thought she'd pull through. I was afraid I should have to send for you."

"All that long distance?" said Jane, lifting the kettle from the fire and pouring some boiling water into the tea-pot.

"Yes. Is that tea fresh, Jane?" He disliked her economical habit of adding a fresh spoonful of tea to the old stewed leaves.

"Fresh or not it's all you're going to get," she responded tartly.

Adam accepted the tea without further remonstrance. It proved to be fresh, and she might so easily have said so, but she preferred the ungracious answer. She was a good woman, unselfish, self-sacrificing as her life had abundantly proved, but adversity and poverty had soured and hardened her character.

Jane fell back upon another grievance.

"It's all nonsense sending Rachel right down to Cornwall. There's places nearer where she'd have been just as well, and where we could have visited her without spending so much time and money. I haven't had a sight of her all these months. And not a soul near her who cares twopence about her."

Rachel was far happier and more tranquil without her sister, but Adam was careful not to allude to this fact.

"Oh, she's right enough," he said. "She likes the place, and she can see the sea from her window. The air is splendid. And there's a Catholic lady living near who goes to see her and takes her fruit and things. They're rich people, and are very kind."

Jane was mollified.

Adam went on slowly: "I wonder if you'd care to live in the country, Jane? Sometimes I think life would be easier for you there. It's so clean—so fresh—so different!" He paused, aware that her rugged face had undergone a slight stiffening.

"This 'ouse was never good enough for you I know that, Addie," she said. "But it's good enough for me. And you can't sell or let it without I give my leave, so don't let me hear any more nonsense

about living in the country. You'd only be ten times more idle, loafing about the fields and lanes, than you are here."

"I only asked if you'd like it," he said mildly.

"And I've only told you that I shouldn't," responded Jane, acidly.

There was silence then, and Adam drank his tea. His thoughts were back then in that gap in the Cornish woods where he had come so unexpectedly upon Audrey Tressider. And suddenly she seemed to be irremediably and cruelly removed from him. He could never drag her down to his own level. It had been different somehow, he now told himself, at Millborough, where he had enjoyed definite success of a kind and where he had even had a certain position. It had been possible for him to meet Audrey there on equal terms as he had met her at Abbot's End and at Reddell Park. But those temporary advantages had fallen from him; his social footing had always been uneasy and precarious, and now he had turned his back on that phase of his life for ever. His old hatred for Hubert Tressider scarcely survived at all. He was no longer ambitious. He was a man who had suffered defeat, and who had helped to crystalize that defeat by quietly submitting to it. Yet he was happier, more at peace, than he had ever been in those old feverish, triumphant days. The love of his fellow-men, his ardent desire to help them, would always remain among the strongest sentiments of his heart. He intended to work for them still, but in a different way, on a different plan. And already his ardent crusade among the dangerous trades had produced certain results. His articles, burning, fiery things, had called attention to crying evils. There was talk of a stricter legislation, of compulsory insurance of the employed by their employers, of shorter hours,

of more rigid precautions. It wasn't all lost. . . . There were other men in the field, making their voices heard. Places like Tressider's Works were doomed unless the reforms were carried out. No, it had not been lost, it had even been to a certain extent fruitful. But now his pen was to serve weightier things—the things of the spirit. It was to be dedicated to the service of his Church. The written word—what had it not done to propagate heresy, atheism, agnosticism, spiritualism, by the enemies of the Church? He saw before him a battle-field that was worth while. The Church had need of pens, young, powerful pens. . . . Without conceit Adam knew that his pen was a skilful one, daring, convincing. Henceforward it was to be also a consecrated one. . . .

"Day-dreamin', Addie?" Jane's voice was tinged with scorn. "A lot of good that'll do you. 'Taint the way to bring grist to the mill."

"If one writes one must think, Jane; I ought to think a great deal more than I do."

"Write!" She looked at her brother as if she despised him. "And with your eddication, and all that Mr. Bartlett did for you, you might have been a clerk or a foreman earning your two pound a week. That's what I like—reg'lar work and reg'lar pay. That's what I call an honest living."

"But my work is quite regular, Jane, and it brings me in more than two pounds a week." His voice was mildly remonstrative.

But Jane was unconvinced, and this was a rare opportunity of voicing some of her pet opinions.

"Work! You call that work, do yer? Lazy, idle ways I call it. Sittin' in your room all day. But you was always lazy. I mind the time when I used to take the stick to yer for it, Addie."

The conversation sickened him, just as in the past her intemperate violence had sickened him with its

sense of futile brutality. He could see himself, a weak, nervous, intimidated child, in her powerful grasp.

But he only said:

"You can't change people's natures, Jane. Although I may seem idle to you I am really working very hard."

"Todd was round here two nights ago," she resumed presently, "I'd locked the door and I wasn't going to let him in. He was in one of his nasty tempers. Drunk he was and very violent. Asked where Rachel was, and wanted money. The old story. And out of work, of course." Speaking of Todd's delinquencies made her forget momentarily her ancient grievance against Adam.

"Let him come while I'm here, that's all," said Adam, "I'll give him a touch of the law."

"Very fine talkin', but Todd, he don't care about the law."

"He'll have to care if he goes to prison."

"Well, I don't hold with getting your relations punished," said Jane. "Seems to bring disgrace on the whole family. And he's Rachel's husband when all's said and done, and your brother-in-law and mine."

It was a point she liked to emphasize when she considered that Adam was inclined to give himself airs. And he had offended her that afternoon by his tentative suggestion about leaving the Bow Road.

"Did he go away at last?" he inquired.

"Stayed till two constables came in sight and then he bolted. Todd don't like the look of constables."

"Well, he'd better not come again," said Adam, rising and moving towards the door. "I'm going up to my room now, Jane."

"Going to write po'try, Addie?" she asked, witheringly.

"No, I'm not in the mood for that," he said.

He closed the door and mounted up the dark wooden stairs to his attic under the roof. It was spacious enough, although the ceiling came down so low in two places that he had to bend his head. The dormer window looked out on the back. There was a little yard below with a solitary lilac bush that in spring put forth a few pitiful flowers. The houses in the neighbouring street showed their backs to him, and long rows of washing flapped idly in the breeze.

"I can't stand it—I simply can't," he said to himself, "Jane grows worse every day." He felt as if he had turned his back on paradise and descended into an unlovely purgatory. "Oh, my darling, you're right—I must never see you again."

He sat down near his big writing-table and buried his face in his hands.

They were having supper that evening, when there was a loud knock at the front door. Todd's voice could be heard below, raised in malediction.

"Todd," observed Jane laconically. She rose, went to the window, and drew aside the curtain of coarse Nottingham lace. In the dusk she could distinguish a figure leaning against the railings, his face upturned.

"Let me go down to him," said Adam.

Before he could reach the door Jane had caught him by the sleeve in an endeavour to restrain him.

"Now you just take my advice and leave Todd alone. He'll stay there till he's tired and then he'll go away. He can't get in—I've locked the door."

"I'm not going to have him coming and making a row here," said Adam. "He must learn to keep away."

"Addie, you'd just best leave him alone. Todd's a tough customer when he's angry and drunk."

"Do you suppose I care? I won't give in to him." He broke free from Jane and ran lightly down the stairs. He flung open the front door and found Todd actually on the doorstep. A strong whiff of spirits greeted him.

Todd, at first slightly surprised and alarmed at the sudden apparition, became suddenly violent.

"Go away!" said Adam, "how dare you come here and make that noise night after night? I hear you've been trying to get money out of Jane by threats. If you don't go away at once I shall fetch a policeman and have you removed."

A whole world divided the two men—Adam, tall, almost distinguished-looking with his dark hair and pale face, and Todd with his red dissipated countenance and bleared blue eyes, his rough, workman's clothes. Yet once they had sat side by side in the same class, and Todd had married Adam's sister.

The very sight of Adam always aroused Todd's jealous wrath, and his words, his threat to fetch a policeman, still further incensed him. He doubled his fist and aimed a blow straight at Kemp's face. Adam dexterously eluded it.

"You'd better go unless you wish to be arrested. You've been trying to extort money from Jane by threats and violence. If I give you in charge you'll get three months."

Todd was suddenly sobered. Prison, with its complete lack of those things which are essential to his comfort and with its compulsory labour, had no attraction for him. The absence of gin and beer was a mortification that affected him more profoundly than the actual loss of liberty. He had not been there for two years, but the memory was still fresh in his mind.

"Now look 'ere, brother Addie, if you send me to quod I'll do yer in even if I wuz to swing for it." His look was ugly.

"Do you suppose I care for your silly threats? Now do you mean to go?"

Todd had no intention of going just as things were getting lively. He felt that he was still capable of besting Adam in a "scrap." But this time he did not take the precaution of seeing that the road was clear of his arch-enemies, the police, nor did he seem to be aware that the usual little idle crowd had gathered to see the progress of such a promising dispute. Todd was not unknown as a "bruiser"; he had had many and many a fight in his day, and would pluckily stand up to men far heavier and taller than himself.

He hurled his fist a second time in the direction of Adam's face, and uttered a volley of oaths that awakened some merriment among the onlookers, one of whom exclaimed sympathetically:

"Go it, little 'un!"

Todd's condition, his language, to say nothing of his violence, attracted the attention of a passing policeman. Not many minutes elapsed before he was taken into custody and marched away, still breathing anathemas, between two stalwart upholders of the law. A volley of scurrilous epithets hurled at Adam characterized his unwilling departure.

Adam returned to his sister. Jane received him coldly. He had brought about exactly the situation which she wished to avoid. She had no liking for Todd, but she resented the fact that Adam should consider himself superior to the class to which he belonged. And now that Todd was in actual disgrace her anger against her brother was great.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied now," she said, eyeing him disdainfully.

Adam said not a word. He had been more upset by the scene than he cared to say. It was sordid, horrible, it took him farther away from Audrey.

She could never, never share his life. He could not utterly cut himself off from his sisters.

In due course Todd was brought before the magistrate and received a sentence of three months' imprisonment for being drunk and disorderly and for demanding money with menaces. All the time Adam was giving his evidence his words were interrupted by violent disclaimers from the dock. Todd was not a pleasant sight that morning. It seemed impossible that he could really be the bright open-faced boy with sunny fair hair with whom he had in their school-days so often shared his hours of leisure. Nor had he much resemblance to the sufficiently comely young man whom Rachel had married. . . . Adam went home when the repulsive business was over, pitying Todd and yet feeling that the punishment was a necessary one if they were to live in peace.

He urged Jane not to mention the matter in her letters to Rachel.

"She's so ill—it might worry her very much and make her worse," he explained.

Jane was engaged in washing up, and her arms, bared to the elbow, were steaming and dripping with the greasy water. She made everything she had to do so unlovely, Adam thought, and yet as he looked at her hard roughened hands a pang of pity pierced him.

"It's too late to think of that, Addie. You brought it on Todd, and Rachel oughter know it. Besides, a wife has a right to know where her 'usbin is."

"Not when she's ill, dying, and he's in prison!" said Adam, indignantly.

Jane looked at him, and the little fog of steam blurred her face which had a grim expression of disapproval.

"Mebbe you're ashamed now to think you've been so hard on pore Todd," she said.

Yes, it was all very well for him she thought, speaking and looking like a gentleman, with something of an alien fastidiousness which did not belong to his station of life, to judge Todd who had known poverty in its most grinding and bitter aspects. Small blame to him if he took a "drop or two" to comfort him, and Adam, his own brother-in-law, should have shielded him rather than have given him into custody.

"No, I'm not ashamed," said Kemp gravely, "it was unsafe for you having him hanging about here, and most unpleasant for us both."

"You and I see things differently," said Jane. "And I never asked you to be my protector. I can look arter myself, or I'd be in a bad way by now."

"I'm only begging you not to tell poor Rachel," persisted Kemp.

"I'm the best judge of that," said Jane, in a final tone.

Adam felt exasperated by her reiterated refusal to comply with his request. He saw that Jane intended to disregard his wishes, partly, perhaps, to show her complete independence. Hadn't she settled things for herself all these years, without reference to him?

"You went against me about Todd, and I'm going against you about Rachel," she said, wiping the plates with a somewhat grimy cloth. "She must know it sooner or later, and I say the sooner the better."

Adam relinquished his argument. Of what use to combat this stone-wall opposition? He felt at that moment that he almost hated Jane, and that it was impossible to go on living with her. It was a degrading life that jarred upon him more every day.

"You'd just best look arter your own skin when Todd comes out of quod," she said, relapsing into the vernacular of her youth. "Three months don't last forever!"

Adam went up to his room to finish an article which must be sent in that night. The necessity of accomplishing this task in a given time steadied his nerves. It required an effort of will to concentrate upon it, to detach himself from the remembrance of Jane's irritating words. When the article was finished and neatly typed he went out to post it, and then returned to a dreary contemplation of the day that was just passed. It had been odious, degrading, sordid. He wanted to breathe a freer air, the air of Cornwall. Desperately his soul cried out for freedom, for cleanliness, for solitude. Poverty was bearable in the country with the fresh sea-wind blowing in one's face. Never had he hated his environment with such an ardent hatred as he had done that day. From all the coarse brutalities of Todd's recriminations, hurled at him from the dock, certain words clung ineffaceably to his memory. *"Uster run arter a lydy, didn't yer? As if any lydy ud look at yer, brother Addie? Called yer the gutter-genius, didn't they?"*

Little foolish boastings, perhaps, of Rachel's, gathered and stored in Todd's memory when he lived with his wife and heard the intimate family gossip so often centered proudly round "Addie's" achievements. Rachel had never wearied of speaking of her beloved brother, to whom she looked up with a mingled reverence and love, as of a being far higher and greater than herself. Adam could hear her gentle voice prattling most innocently of his successes, little dreaming of the insults Todd would thereafter offer him, founded on those very revelations. Adam had felt his face burn under the attack.

CHAPTER XXXV

RACHEL'S FUNERAL

AUDREY had gone up to Park's Farm one morning in early June not long after Kemp's departure, and to her surprise she found Mrs. Todd in tears. As a rule Rachel bore her sufferings bravely, and was bright and even hopeful concerning them.

In her hand was an ill-written letter which she gave to Audrey with a sob, saying, "Read it, miss. My poor old Jim—if I'd been there it wouldn't have happened. . . ."

She was still in complete ignorance of Kemp's having known Miss Tressider at Millborough. The name conveyed nothing to her, and Adam kept a rigourous silence regarding that past episode. Rachel had no idea that they had ever known each other prior to that meeting in the Trevore woods, when Audrey had given him the bunch of bluebells and the little basket of fruit for her.

Audrey took up the flimsy sheet of common, lined note-paper. Jane's calligraphy was at no time easy to read, and her spelling and grammar were far from perfect. But the substance of the letter was gruesomely intelligible. Jim had had a row with Addie outside the house, although Jane had begged Addie not to take any notice of his brother-in-law who wasn't "quite hisself" (an euphuism that was always employed to describe the effects of his frequent bouts of intoxication); he had used violent language, had Jim, had tried to strike Addie in the face, and unfortunately had been taken into custody. Now he had got three months, and Addie had gone into court and given evidence against him.

It was not a pleasant little story, and Audrey was astonished to find that Rachel's tears were caused far more by anger than by shame. She was angry with Adam as the cause of Jim's disgrace.

"You see, miss, I did use to love Todd, and he's my 'usbin and the father of my pore little babbies. I can't bear to think of him put away, and all along of Addie. Jane says she did beg Addie not to take any notice of him, but Addie never could abide Todd."

Audrey put out her hand and touched Rachel's burning, claw-like fingers.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so very sorry for you," she said.

"It's 'ard on Todd, miss. He's got plenty of good in him has my Jim, but the bad's on the surface-like. But even when he was pretty near the death of me once I'd never any hand in his being put away. Found me unconscious, they did miss, and carried me orf to the 'orspital, and Todd was took in custody because of what a neighbour told against him. When it's your own 'usbin, miss, you can't turn on 'em no matter if they do knock you about a bit."

Audrey was touched by the simple statement. Rachel bore Todd no ill-will for all that past violence. He was her "man," and whatever his faults he had been faithful to her. The blows were long ago forgiven. She came of a class where blows form no infrequent episodes of married life.

"And he never knocked me about 'cept when he was drunk, miss," she added by way of excuse.

"Your sister seems to blame Mr. Kemp, too," said Audrey, reverting to the letter.

"Yes, miss. Jane and Addie don't never agree. Seems sometimes as if they couldn't. But she's right this time, miss, he hadn't ought to have got poor Todd put away like this. Todd'll be just mad when

he comes out. Many's the time he's been mad with Addie, and threatened to do for him."

Audrey shuddered. She almost feared real danger for Adam when Todd was released from gaol. Then she tried to picture Kemp in those sordid home surroundings of his. Proud and sensitive, he must, she knew, suffer acutely from such degrading little episodes. She longed then to say a word in his defense to Rachel who blamed him, just as Jane blamed him, for failing to attain to what seemed a mistaken standard of loyalty. But no words came. The husband, despite all his faults, his violence and his cruelty, so obviously came before the brother who had been unfailingly kind and generous to the sick woman. Jane, too, had ranged herself on the side of Todd. Audrey felt almost sick with shame as she contemplated the miserable little story.

Rachel's tears flowed afresh. She was very weak, and the news, rather brutally communicated by Jane, had unnerved her.

"And if I die while Todd's put away, miss, I shan't never see him again. My poor old Jim! And when all's said and done I am his *wife,* and I've borne him four children. Todd would have been a better man if his children had lived. . . ." She spoke the words between sobs that threatened to choke her.

Audrey felt rather helpless. She said nothing, and Rachel continued still in the same broken tones:

"Maybe Addie didn't take no stock of that—of my dying while Jim's shut up. Addie can be 'ard, miss, though perhaps you wouldn't think it to look at him. Yet once he and Todd used to be friends when they went to the same school as little chaps. And 'tain't right to turn against your own kith and kin." Rachel's tears flowed now unchecked. "Addie oughter have thought of me lying here."

Always she returned to Adam's shortcomings. That Todd should be in prison was indeed no new thing; he had been there already on several occasions, and had once run the risk of being tried on a very grave charge, but that Adam should have been directly instrumental in getting him sent there was a different matter. Both sisters were evidently smarting under this act of injustice, as they regarded it, but Audrey felt that Jane had not revealed the whole truth, had perhaps laid undue stress on Adam's share in the disaster, and had omitted to state fully the provocation he had received. Audrey had never found Adam hard with his fellowmen, but she was aware that he bore his brother-in-law an old grudge for his persistent maltreatment of Rachel.

Rachel presently pulled at a piece of ribbon that encircled her throat, and disclosd a small cheap gilt locket in which was the photograph of a young man. He wore the rough clothes of a labourer, and his face was in no sense prepossessing. The forehead was low, the eyes were small and set near together, the nose and mouth were coarsely moulded, and the general expression was truculent and rather brutal.

"That's my pore Jim, miss. Took soon after we were married. He wur a very likely young man in those days." Rachel contemplated the portrait of Todd with lurking admiration and even with a strange pride.

Audrey tried to picture the two men side by side. Their childhood together, their shared intimacies, their old boyish friendship, their occasional quarrels. She forced herself to contemplate these aspects of Kemp's past. "It must make me care less—it *must*," she told herself. "I ought to have tried to realize it long algo. Hubert was right to keep us apart. I ought to be grateful instead of angry." These thoughts were a chastisement. She would not let

herself think of the divine music of his voice when he told her that he loved her. She had been criminally foolish where Kemp was concerned—Kemp whose brother-in-law was doing three months for assault and for using threatening language.

Audrey went home that day troubled and silent. In the woods the rhododendrons were beginning to display their great spaces of crimson fire, and the young bracken was uncurling delicious emerald shoots. She hurried back, thinking that she had stayed too long with Rachel and would perhaps be late for luncheon. As a rule she liked to linger in the Trevore woods that were so beautiful at that time of year in their brilliant spring livery.

At luncheon she was obviously preoccupied and ill at ease. Mrs. Corby noticed it and wondered what was the matter, wondering, too, if she had had the misfortune to meet Kemp again up at the Farm. No doubt he would return again and again to Trevore to catch a glimpse of her. . . . But Mrs. Corby kept these musings to herself. Audrey was old enough to fight her own battles, and it was useless to interfere. She loved an ineligible man and she was suffering because of that love, yet Mrs. Corby believed that she was fully awake to the necessity of conquering it. Separation would help her, and perhaps the daily intercourse with Mrs. Todd would be beneficial. And the return of Myles Dorling would help—yes, there was additional hope in that. Mrs. Corby could never believe that Myles would suffer by comparison with Kemp.

The summer passed, and Mrs. Corby remained on at the Manor. There was unusual heat in England that year, and during the very hot days of August Rachel became suddenly worse. She had been failing during the summer, but the end came rather unexpectedly. There was just time to sum-

mon a priest from a neighbouring town to administer the Last Sacraments, but Adam and Jane did not arrive until all was over. The funeral took place a few days later.

It was on the occasion of the funeral that Mrs. Corby saw Adam Kemp for the first and last time, and despite all her preconceived prejudices she was compelled to acknowledge that there was some reason for Audrey's infatuation. His beautiful strange face would have attracted attention anywhere, with its finely-cut features, its dark burning eyes. It was difficult to believe that he was the brother of the short thick-set woman who stood or knelt by his side, wearing a terrible crape erection in the shape of a bonnet on her head. Adam looked and spoke like a gentleman, and on seeing him Mrs. Corby's old alarm underwent a new and vigourous awakening. He was not the kind of man whom a girl would be likely to love and then to forget easily. He had a look of distinction; his manner when he came up and spoke to Audrey after the requiem Mass was over was both simple and charming. Mrs. Corby felt that she should never forget the look of passionate appeal he bestowed upon Audrey then. Sensitive to voices, she could readily acknowledge the indisputable beauty of Adam's. But from him she looked towards Jane who stood a little apart, jealously eyeing her brother, and the grim, woe-begone, slightly grimy face of the elder Miss Kemp made Mrs. Corby's heart sink afresh.

Yet she was glad to think that Audrey had not bestowed her love upon a wholly unworthy object. This man Kemp was a personality, and it was more than likely that he would make his way in the world and perhaps end by winning fame and fortune. Men had risen to front rank from as small beginnings as his. And there were undoubted possibilities in him.

A man so rarely dowered with physical beauty, and with so much grace and charm, would undoubtedly win through. There was even a tinge of regret in Mrs. Corby's face as she watched him get into the closed carriage with his sister and drive slowly away in the direction of Trevore.

She had watched the parting between him and Audrey and had listened to his words of farewell.

"Good-bye, Miss Tressider. Let me thank you once more for all your kindness to dear Rachel."

Audrey's face was pale and hard as a stone. But her eyes watched him wistfully. Mrs. Corby laid a hand upon her arm.

"My dear, shall we go home?"

When they were in the motor Audrey leaned back and the tears came into her eyes. She had been looking forward with a great deal of hope and some little dread to this meeting with Kemp. But he had only said what actual politeness demanded; he had made no suggestion with regard to any future meeting. She had wanted to see him once more before he left Cornwall. It was difficult to let him go like that. He was, alas, taking it too much for granted that she did not wish to see him.

She realized then that perhaps he intended this separation to be final.

CHAPTER XXXVI

RETURN OF MYLES DORLING

FOR several days Audrey hoped for some word or sign from Kemp. It was difficult to believe that he intended to leave Trevore without seeking her out, nevertheless after a few days she was compelled to face the fact that this had happened. He was going to bow to her wishes and make the separation final.

She heard news of his departure with Jane two days after the funeral, communicated laconically by Mrs. Park. "Mr. Kemp was quite the gentleman, and had paid very handsomely. Yes, their boxes had been labelled to London." . . . That meant he had gone home, to the Bow Road.

The very fact of his returning to the home of his childhood, taking up long-severed threads in a spirit of deep humility, was only one of many changes in his life. She seemed to see in this a desire to emphasize the things that divided them. He had taken her at her word—he had deliberately avoided the opportunity of seeing her. It touched Audrey's pride to the quick. He was forgetting. . . .

Her own life with Mrs. Corby passed uneventfully. In September Myles Dorling wrote from France to say he would be back in England in a few days. He begged to be allowed to come as soon as possible to Trevore. It was hardly a year since his first meeting with the Tressiders, and Mrs. Corby used to wonder sometimes if he would find Audrey greatly changed. She had passed during those months of his absence from girlhood into womanhood. She had had a passionate experience

of an unusual kind that had wholly altered her outlook upon life. But Mrs. Corby sincerely believed that all risk of trouble with Kemp was at an end. He had had the singular courage to cut off all communication with her, even at a moment when he had loved her very deeply. When Mrs. Corby considered this fact she was no longer able to withhold a certain admiration from Kemp. He had left the path perfectly clear for any rival, and she knew that he could not have accomplished this without suffering.

It was within a few days of the arrival of Myles Dorling that Audrey received an unexpected letter from Lady Ince, inviting her to spend a week at Abbot's End. To Mrs. Corby's astonishment the girl seemed eager to go. Perhaps she wished to defer the inevitable meeting with Myles as long as possible. There was a suggestion of shrinking from it in her present very obvious eagerness to leave Cornwall. A return to Millborough was deprived of any unpleasantness by the absence of Kemp. She could move tranquilly through those old scenes that had once worn so violent and tempestuous an aspect.

Myles however sent a telegram some days before he was expected and while Audrey was still at Trevore, asking if he might come down. The meeting which she had evidently desired to postpone was now rendered inevitable since she was not due to go to Lady Ince's until the day following Dorling's proposed arrival. Mrs. Corby was secretly rather relieved. She hoped great things of this meeting, and of that sorrowful, intimate discussion of Ninian's last days. She and Audrey were having tea under the cedars on the lawn when they heard the motor approaching down the lane.

The September day was very warm, and Audrey was wearing a white dress for almost the first time

since her brother's death. She always looked younger in white; it suited her, Mrs. Corby thought, better than anything. As she glanced at her she felt that Myles must certainly find her more beautiful than before. Something of her girlish gaiety had gone, but no doubt he would attribute that to her grief at Ninian's death. He could know nothing of Millborough happenings, nor of the fiery experience through which she had passed during the months she had spent there.

Mrs. Corby looked up suddenly.

"I hear the car," she said.

Audrey put down her cup quickly. She felt a definite fear of seeing Myles again. There would be unavoidable and intimate talks about Ninian—interviews that she could not escape. She wished, although she dreaded, to hear all that he could tell her. It was like the re-opening of a wound that was beginning to heal. She had often felt a certain difficulty in realizing Ninian's death.

When she looked up again Myles was coming with swift, easy tread across the lawn.

Mrs. Corby rose and held out her hand.

"My dear Myles! At last!" she said. Her look was wistful; it seemed to entreat him to restore Audrey's lost happiness. She would not think of Kemp then, of his strange arresting beauty. . . .

She watched him as he shook hands with Audrey, his blue eyes searching her face and finding there nothing but that white, frozen look that had come over it. Audrey was very composed. She greeted him quietly, as if he were an old friend whom she was glad to welcome although he brought sorrowful memories with him.

As Mrs. Corby looked at them, standing facing each other, she almost prayed that Myles would persuade Audrey to marry him. A happy marriage

—children of her own—that was what Audrey really needed to heal her past sorrow. Especially the children with their magic arts to restore a woman's peace. Mrs. Corby was old-fashioned enough to believe in the power of nature to satisfy. Audrey must take her life courageously into her own hands, and refuse to look back upon that unhappy, disastrous past. And surely this man would be able to teach her to forget. . . .

Very soon Audrey went away, leaving them together. She felt that they had things to discuss, and that her presence was a constraint. As she crossed the lawn and went towards the house she was a little astonished to find that she was really glad to see Dorling again. She had never thought of him as a friend, and now he seemed to her like an old and dear friend. She had dreaded the meeting for more reasons than one, and most of all perhaps because of her very real fear that he would renew his old demands. Yet now that he had actually come, she felt a distinct sense of pleasure.

Myles watched the vanishing white figure.

"She doesn't seem at all angry with me," he said, "and I was so afraid she would blame me."

"Oh, she doesn't blame anyone," said Mrs. Corby hastily.

Myles was silent for a moment, then he said:

"Do you think there is any hope for me? You know I have not changed at all. I've been dreading to hear of her engagement. I've felt that others must see—"

"She is not engaged," said Mrs. Corby cautiously, "but she's had a pretty bad time. I don't know how far she's got over it, and I'm telling you this so that you musn't feel discouraged if things don't go quite right at first. You must have patience." . . .

"Yes," said Myles, in a sobered tone. So there had been someone, someone who had loved her. . . . He wondered where the hitch had lain. Mrs. Corby's manner seemed to suggest that there had been some calamity connected with the affair. Why did she urge him to wait—to be patient? He was ready to wait for long years if only Audrey might be his in the end. . . .

"Wasn't Tressider nice to her?" he asked. Yet even as he spoke he felt certain that it had concerned Hubert but little.

"Oh, it wasn't only Hubert, though he certainly behaved rather odiously. But," her voice dropped a little as if she hesitated to speak, "there was another man, you know, Myles."

"I suspected it," he said. "I can't tell you why. Won't you tell me?"

Mrs. Corby had always intended to be frank with Myles. Whatever happened he must not be kept in the dark. She answered slowly:

"He was a very clever, attractive man, but a man of the people, Myles."

"Of the people!"

"Yes."

"Whom she cared for?" His tone was both horrified and sceptical.

"And who cared for her."

His face fell.

"It is all over, I hope," continued Mrs. Corby. "They have apparently agreed not to see each other again. Audrey has suffered very much, first from Hubert's intemperate interference, and then from her own decision."

"Tell me his name, please." His voice was steady, and the blue eyes that sought hers were steady too.

"Adam Kemp."

"Adam Kemp!"

There was a long pause, during which Myles took out a cigarette and lit it. Then he said:

"I've heard of him, you know, and I saw him once, ages ago, at Oxford. Mrs. Grazebrook often spoke of him to me last year. She was afraid then that her sister might marry him."

"Evangeline is safely married to Lord Wanford."

"Have you ever seen Kemp?"

"Yes, once. He was down here not long ago for his sister's funeral, and I am bound to say that he impressed me. I was bitterly prejudiced against him as you can imagine. But when I saw him I understood his attraction . . . he is very nearly beautiful, you know. Just the kind of man, brilliant, eloquent, a little unstable, to take the heart of a very young girl by storm." . . .

"But not Miss Tressider," he said quickly, "never Miss Tressider. I remember seeing Kemp years ago at Oxford, holding forth at some meeting. He was a terrible person then."

"I wanted you to know exactly where you stand. It won't be easy, Myles, but I'm sure she sees how impossible it is that she should marry Kemp. So be patient—be very kind." . . . She looked at him with entreaty.

"I care for her more than ever," he said suddenly. "She has not changed except to become more beautiful. And I would give the world to make her happy. . . ."

"She is trying so hard to forget. Sometimes it makes my heart ache," said Mrs. Corby.

Myles rose and walked restlessly up and down the lawn, a few paces from her. The news perturbed him. It was so different in detail from anything he had remotely suspected.

"Do you know where he is now?" he asked, stopping in front of Mrs. Corby.

"Living with his sister in the Bow Road. He comes from the East End, you know. I believe he's writing now for the Catholic Church as a result of Audrey's influence. He has given up his old political ambitions, and he's left Millborough."

"And you're sure they never meet, never correspond?"

"I feel certain she would tell me if they did," said Mrs. Corby. "Audrey's very frank with me."

Myles gazed meditatively towards the house.

"What a perfectly charming place this is," he said rather irrelevantly; "just the kind of peaceful English spot one dreams of in the desert."

"I hope some day it will be your home," said Mrs. Corby. "I intend to leave it to Audrey. Of course it was to have gone to Ninian. But Audrey is very fond of it—I hope she will live here a great deal when I'm dead."

"I wish she had stayed here all the time," he said.

"Yes," she agreed, "that visit to Hubert was a disastrous mistake from every point of view. And one thought there was so little to fear there—of that kind I mean. By the way, she is going to stay with Lady Ince near Millborough to-morrow."

"So soon?" he said. He was disappointed.

"Yes—it was all settled last week before you wrote. So you musn't blame Audrey. You can stay on if you will till she comes back. I don't fancy she'll be there long."

"I should like to stay," he said. "I want to see her."

"Yes. You might talk to her about poor Ninian to-night—get that over, Myles. It will be painful for you both."

His blue eyes filled with tears. "He was a splendid lad," he said, "so much pluck and spirit. Never gave in till the day before he died. He was as brave as a lion. I felt how she must have loved him." . . .

"Indeed she did," said Mrs. Corby. "He was her whole world until she went to Millborough."

"I must tell her about it," he said. "You know I've been so afraid that she would blame me."

"She won't blame you," Mrs. Corby promised him. "She's a very different person from the girl you left. But her religion's a help to her—sometimes indeed I think it is the only help she has."

He found Audrey alone after dinner that evening. Mrs. Corby had retired to her own sitting-room, partly to write some letters that must go by an early post, and partly to give Myles an opportunity of seeing Audrey alone.

There was a small fire in the grate, for the evening had turned chilly, and Audrey's chair was drawn up close to it.

He began almost at once to speak of Ninian, of his death very far from any town or village, of the extraordinary coincidence that that very morning a White Father on his wanderings should have arrived at their little encampment. It had seemed, Myles said, like an answer to prayer. The priest had remained with them for several days, so that Ninian had received not only the last Sacraments but also Catholic burial. At this point in his story Myles stopped. He paused for a moment and then said:

"I had learnt a great deal from Ninian. He was, as you must know, very keen about his religion. He was never tired of speaking of it. When the White Father came I seemed to have only one wish—to be received myself."

"And were you?" said Audrey, deeply interested. It seemed wonderful to her that Ninian's holy death

in the wilderness should have borne fruit so swiftly.

"Yes," said Myles. "I was very ill then, as I think I told you. They thought at one time that I should die. And I felt that when my time came I should wish to die as Ninian had died . . . fortified." . . .

There was a strange, almost mystical expression in his blue eyes. Out there in those untrodden forests and wastes of sand a man might learn to come very close to God. Death was prone to come suddenly, swiftly, mercilessly. It behooved one to be prepared."

"I am very glad that Ninian did that for you," she said.

Seeing him close she could perceive that he had aged a good deal in the past months. His fair hair was tinged with grey, and there were sharp lines about his eyes and mouth. The failure of his enterprise, the death of Ninian, had alike saddened him. And now that he had come back he found Audrey further from him than ever.

His eyes met hers, and he thought of the beautiful bright boy so like her, with eyes and brow so wonderfully like hers, who had died in his arms. The remembrance of that poignant scene encouraged him to say:

"I asked you once to think of me as your friend. If there is anything a friend can do to help you now, I hope you will tell me."

She grew very white. "Not you—not you—of all people," he heard her murmur.

"And why not me?" he asked.

"Because you—" She stopped. "Oh, when you know all that has happened since you went away you will perhaps say hard and bitter things to me, just as Hubert did. Things to make me feel disgraced, humiliated."

"I should never do that," said Myles steadily. "And I know a little—a very little—of what has happened."

"Adam Kemp asked me to marry him when I was in Millborough. I loved him, but I couldn't face the separation from all those I cared for. Especially from Ninian. I refused to marry him, but I still love him. I think you have a right to know that." . . . She clasped her hands and averted her face a little from him.

"If you really love him why don't you marry him?" he said.

"I believe that if he were to come back and ask me again I should say yes." Her voice was very grave.

Myles was silent. In that speech of hers he saw much more than the shattering of his own hopes, the blotting out of all his future as he had painted it in fair, glowing colours; he saw beyond all that and his thoughts were fixed upon what seemed to him the immeasurably greater thing—the havoc of her life. He saw it too in a relentless light, rendered all the more convincing by the slight personal knowledge he had of Kemp. Kemp, as he had seen him more than a dozen years ago, holding forth at some socialistic meeting at Oxford. Kemp, eloquent, perfervid, rough-looking, long-haired, with a slight cockney twang especially perceptible in those moments when he warmed to his task. Myles had never seen the present-day Kemp, and the one of whom he had had that glimpse was assuredly not a man to approach Audrey in the least intimate social relation. Nor was it merely on account of his birth that Myles so judged him, although the attributes of class are relentless things, as are its standards, its shibboleths, and ideals. He could remember considering Kemp unscrupulous. He had

disliked the way in which he had encouraged Miss Standen to assist him in his political campaigns. He disliked, too, all that he had heard of his attacks upon Hubert. There had been even some suggestion that he had used Audrey as an instrument wherewith to punish Hubert.

"Miss Tressider," he said, "I think you know in your heart that your brother was, in the main, right although he may have seemed cruel to you. He wished to save you from a suffering far more cruel than this present separation can be—a penance that might continue till the end of your life. You know there is nothing I would not do to help you, but in this I dare not help you. Not because of my own love for you which has never changed, it is not from any selfish motive of that sort . . . it is because you don't know Kemp at all, you cannot possibly judge of a man like that. Your feeling for him has perhaps blinded you to his unfitness."

"Ah, you don't really know him!" Her eyes glowed, and a softness suffused her whole face. Myles would have given half his life for the power to call up that look into her face. And it was Kemp who had won her love, her fidelity. . . . Kemp, with his cranks, his crusades, his anarchical tendencies . . . a man infinitely below her in all things. Myles's heart sank within him as he reviewed the situation. Was she telling him all this so frankly that she might kill any hope that he still cherished of making her his wife? . . .

"Audrey," he said, "I think I need not tell you that I have lived through all these past months for this moment of seeing you again. Let me help you to forget Kemp, a man whom you can never marry. Give me the right to protect you—to love you." . . .

"No," she said, "you can't help me—I wish you could. And it is very good of you to love me still,"

she added with that simplicity which often characterized her speech. You musn't think that I let myself love Adam easily. I fought against it—I told him that it was my wish that we should never see each other again. But sometimes I think he needs me—I'm unhappy about him—I'm afraid of him slipping back into the old careless ways. . . . And he is dear to me—so very dear." . . . Her voice failed away into silence.

Dear to her? Myles brushed his hand across his forehead as if to shut out an ugly vision. But he had not now one word to say of comfort or of hope. This love of hers created an immense, an intolerable barrier between them. Yet paradoxically enough he felt grateful for the fact that she was able to speak of it to him.

"You are very good and generous to wish to help me," she went on. "I was afraid when you knew all that you would feel as Hubert did. I am sorry too that love came to me like this. I dreamed of it once as something that would raise me, not drag me downwards. . . . Yet is it downwards? He used to give me the feeling that we could climb such heights together . . . he and I!"

"I don't say a word about his social position," said Myles warmly, "though surely the little things that mark a man's upbringing—tricks of manner and accent and so forth—must mean more to a woman than they do even to a man. But if he were your equal in all these things, of birth and class, he would still by reason of his character, his outlook, be utterly unworthy of you. Your generous impulses are too strong—you pity this man till you think you love him. He is neither worthy of your love nor of your pity. I pray you may find it out before it is too late, before he has finally overruled your scruples and persuaded you to be his wife."

His look of sadness as he spoke arrested her. Nevertheless she said:

"I don't think he wants me any more. He has made no effort to see me again—he has not written to me since his sister's funeral. And yet it is so difficult for me to believe that he has ceased altogether to care for me."

To him it was pitiable that she should be waiting thus humbly for some sign from Kemp. It was an outrage to her queenliness that he should dare thus to abase her—to turn his back upon her when caprice suggested that he should neglect her. Myles wanted ardently to shield her from petty degrading humiliations such as these.

"Audrey," he said, "I want you to be my wife. Ninian knew of the hope I had—the hope I dared to have. . . . He was, I think, glad. I could give you up—I think without too much pain— if I knew that thus I should secure your happiness. But not to Kemp . . . never to Kemp."

He bent down and taking her hand raised it to his lips. There was something of renunciation in the action as she read it. In a flash she seemed to divine what her life with Myles would have been. Secure and safe and sheltered, ordered, gracious, even beautiful. . . . She closed her eyes against the vision. It was not for her. Adam's hands seemed to be dragging her very far from such things as these. She knew the odds were against her if she married Kemp, the hazard would be so great that she would be gambling with her life's happiness, even with her very soul. . . . What if she lost in this throw of the dice? She had a moment's temptation to utter these thoughts to Myles. But prudence prevailed. She believed that Kemp had ceased to care. Of what use then to speak of it? . . .

CHAPTER XXXVII

"I HAVE COUNTED THE COST"

ON the following day when Audrey was standing waiting for her train on Euston platform she came face to face with Adam Kemp.

He almost passed her, hurrying forward with a bag in his hand. Then suddenly perceiving her, he came up to her. But the cold, aloof look he bestowed upon her might have been given to a stranger. She seemed to realize in a flash that his first impulse had been to pass her by.

"Mr. Kemp, won't you speak to me?"

He was very pale, as he stood there regarding with some distrust the little grey-gloved hand she held out to him.

"Where are you going?" he inquired.

"To Millborough—to Abbot's End," she said.

"This is our train coming in now. I'm going to Millborough too—to speak at a meeting Father Blake's getting up."

When the train moved into the station he flung open the door of a compartment.

"Shall we travel down together, or do you prefer to go alone?"

"Together, please," she said.

He stood aside to let her pass in, taking her bag from her and throwing it upon the seat. It was his old commanding way that she had missed so indescribably, and which she had found in no one else. She had anew the sense of giving up her will to his, of submitting without question to his judgment, while his nearness thrilled her with an odd sense of satisfied joy. . . .

"Are you sure you don't prefer to be alone?" He looked down at her as if she were something very

small and young and frail that yet had power to inflict a mortal hurt.

"I am quite sure!"

Even if he wished to leave her—to put an end to all things between them—she would still have this little hour. Words from some half-forgotten poem echoed in her ears:

Love that had robbed us so now blessed our dearth . . .

She groped her way in and sat down in a corner seat. Adam followed her and shut the door. He took the seat opposite to hers.

"Let's hope we may be alone!" he said.

Audrey was silent. She was no longer afraid. She wanted to put out her hands and touch him, to assure herself that he was really there, that this was no dream-vision.

Presently the train moved out of the station. Many people in passing had glanced into the carriage and then had passed on. They were alone. . . . Kemp arose and, bending down, put his arms around her, kissing her. There was something in his action both fearless and simple.

"So you've come back to me, my beloved?" he said, and his eyes were bright with tears. "I thought I had lost you forever."

Her rejoinder was quick with pain.

"And I thought I had lost you."

"But you made no sign. You told me we were never to meet. . . ."

"I know . . . I know . . . I did what I ought to have done. What they all expected of me."

"Oh, my dear, have you been suffering too?" His eyes rested upon her with an infinite tenderness.

"Yes."

"You might have written. You had only to write.

. . . You'd sent me away right enough, and I'd seen Vandom, and he assured me Tressider had told him Dorling was on his way home to marry you. I resolved then to stand aside—to efface myself—to remember you only in my prayers."

"You thought I was so easily faithless?"

"I thought many hard and bitter things of you, Audrey. I am beginning to forget them now." His eyes were fixed on her face. "You must not send me away again. We must be married, and fight our fight together. I've got a good post now—I'm to edit a Catholic paper in the north. It's a first-class opening. We can live quite simply, and be as happy as kings." His very look was a caress.

"You still want to marry me?"

"Audrey!"

"After the way I've treated you?"

"But I'm glad you've had time to study your own heart . . . to find out if the sacrifice was justified."

The train whirled on. Green meadows, broken by endless brick-fields whose acrid odour reached them, stretched on both sides of the line. The autumn sky was wide and pale; on the woods lay a mist of gold, gossamer-spun. Very beautiful to Audrey's eyes that day were the "happy autumn fields."

"I am going to stay with Lady Ince. Will you come to Abbot's End to-morrow and see me?"

"Yes, but it must be in the morning. I'm due back in town to-morrow evening. My precious brother-in-law is let loose again, and I don't like to leave Jane for long."

He knitted his brow in a frown. The future of Jane was still something of a problem. She clung to the house in the Bow Road, despite the constant annoyance caused by Todd.

"Oh, my dear, you have counted the cost, haven't you? I mean there is so much that's sordid still clinging to me!"

"I have counted the cost."

She knew now that separation from Adam was the one unendurable thing. All the rest of the world had ceased to count.

"And will you marry me soon?" he asked.

"I think it might be soon. Lady Ince will help us—she'll be more sympathetic than anyone."

"And your own people?"

"Aunt Cynthia will always be kind, but it will make her very sad. She wants me to marry Myles Dorling. Hubert will never speak to me again. And of course he won't give me any money until I come of age. That'll be early next year you know."

Somehow he had never before fully realized her youth. She had been scarcely twenty when he first saw her. He tried to assure himself that he was not doing her a grievous wrong. . . . He had no right to demand her love. He ought even now to leave her, before it was too late. To capture her thus in her young youth, to take her away from all that was hers by right of birth and education and inheritance, was to accept too great a sacrifice at her hands that were so royally ready to bestow.

The hours sped swiftly as if they were winged things. At last the train drew up in Millborough station and Kemp helped her to alight. They stood together on the long grey platform where she had first seen him, coming as it seemed to greet her on the very threshold of her new life.

"Will Tressider come to meet you?" Kemp asked.

"No—I didn't tell him my train. I shall see him later, perhaps, at Abbot's End. You see I shall have to tell him. . . ."

"Would you like me to go and tell him?" inquired Kemp, as he walked beside her to where the cabs

and carriages and motors were waiting in a long line under the feeble gas-lamps.

"No—no—I ought to do it myself. Nothing he can say will make any difference now."

Kemp went in search of her luggage. Presently he returned with a porter who was carrying her trunk. They found Lady Ince's motor waiting among a number of others.

"So this is good-bye until to-morrow," he said, taking her hand.

"Till to-morrow," echoed Audrey.

He stood there watching with grave face as she drove away. So she had come back to him. . . . A mist swept before his eyes blotting out the vision of her.

She was his forever now, he told himself. Yet with this assurance a strange doubt arose within his heart. Was such happiness as that for him? Would he not be called upon perhaps to make sacrifice of it?

"Something will intervene to keep us apart," he said aloud. "I shall never marry her. It's impossible. . . . But doesn't everyone feel like that when they are first engaged?" He seemed to be staring into a nebulous future that held no sign of Audrey Tressider.

Lady Ince came out into the hall as the motor drove up to the house. She saw before her a very happy-looking, smiling Audrey, and she had expected to find some one who still looked rather sad. Even her black clothes did little to detract from the effect of radiant joy with which her very face was suffused.

"Why, my dear!" . . . she said, kissing her.

Audrey's laugh sounded refreshingly young.

"I've had the most wonderful journey! But I'll tell you all about it—"

"Yes, yes, you must have tea first. It's quite ready."

She linked her arm in Audrey's and led her into the drawing-room. When she had closed the door to her astonishment Audrey flung her arms round her neck.

"Oh, Lady Ince, I've seen him again! And we are really engaged." . . .

"You've seen him again? Do you mean Myles Dorling?"

She was puzzled by Audrey; she had never seen her in such a wildly happy mood before.

"You know I don't mean Myles Dorling!"

Lady Ince's face stiffened delicately.

"You don't mean that you are engaged to Mr. Kemp? I hoped you had turned your back on that episode."

"We met to-day at Euston—we travelled down together."

"My dear child—you'll never be allowed to marry him."

"This time I'm going to take the law into my own hands." Her mouth was set. "I've tried giving him up—never seeing him, never hearing from him. It wasn't any use. And now I'm happy—so very happy."

"Audrey, I don't like it. And just because you are here Hubert will blame me. You always drag me in, and now he will hardly bow to me when we meet."

"I'm not going to care any more what Hubert says. He did his best to separate us last spring. I know he won't give me any money now, but next year he will have to."

"Hubert is very strong—and he hates Mr. Kemp."

Lady Ince regarded her with a curious compassion. Audrey looked too fragile to fight against

such bitter odds. Just now she was happy, but in the years to come when she was able to measure the full extent of her sacrifice, would she still be happy? Would she not be, when the first fervours were over, the most unhappy woman in the world? She said slowly:

"My dear, have you thought what your life will be? I have no class prejudices as you know, we are all equal in the sight of God—how then do we dare despise anyone? But Adam *does* belong to a different social sphere, and I think it may hurt you to stoop . . . as you will have to stoop to marry him."

"I shall not let it hurt me. I don't care if people stare and then look the other way." Audrey suddenly bowed her face in her hands and burst into passionate sobbing. She was overwrought, the mingled joy and surprise of seeing Kemp once more and so unexpectedly, had been too much for her. "You must help me," she said, "I know I can rely upon you. Aunt Cynthia will feel it so fearfully, and Hubert will be angry. You must help me—"

"Yes, I will help you," said Lady Ince, "but I wish you were going to marry Myles—I should feel happier about you then."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

UNDER A NEW STANDARD

THEY had hardly finished tea when a telephone message came from Kemp begging them both to go to the meeting that night. Lady Ince required but little persuasion, as she had always wished to go, for Father Blake had organized it on account of a threatened bill that was to provide for the secularization of schools, or at best, to insist upon a form of religious teaching that would be wholly unacceptable to Catholics. Kemp was to be the principal lay speaker, and his popularity in Millborough, where his social work was by no means forgotten, would insure the success of the evening.

"You'd like to go?" she asked Audrey. "You won't be too tired after your journey?"

Audrey thought that nothing could ever tire her again. She felt wonderfully alive, and had a strange sensation of being surrounded by happiness as by an atmosphere—it had ceased to be an interior thing but filled the whole world with its ambient warm waves of light.

"I wanted dreadfully to hear Adam speak," said Audrey. "But I was afraid it would be too late for you."

"Oh, no—this is a very important meeting, and Father Blake was most anxious I should go."

When Kemp came on to the platform that night, amid cheers and yells from all his ancient supporters, Lady Ince felt bound to admit to herself that there was every excuse for Audrey's fatal infatuation for this man. It was his personality, at once arresting and attractive, that marked him out from other men, no less than the grave sculptured

beauty of his face, the magic of his ringing voice with its fine musical tones. Like Mrs. Corby she felt certain that he would succeed in life, perhaps as a speaker, perhaps as a writer, perhaps even as a politician. Indeed, with a wife such as Audrey he was bound to succeed, to climb heights, to win perhaps both name and fame.

These convictions comforted Lady Ince, who loved Audrey and sincerely desired her happiness. And why should she not marry Kemp if to do so were necessary to her happiness? Had she not cared for him so much that she had tried to live without him and failed? Lady Ince, unworldly and detached, could see no reason why Kemp should not make Audrey an excellent husband. Marriage would mean a fresh start for them both. But they were young, they loved each other, they were both Catholics. One could not have everything, and if Audrey had wished for a more generous portion of worldly things she could have had them by accepting Myles Dorling. Lady Ince sighed. It would have been safer so, but youth does not always ask for security.

She sat with Audrey in a little side gallery where they were quite hidden from everyone in the hall. Kemp, knowing their whereabouts, glanced now and then in that direction during his speech, and fancied too that he could catch a glimpse of a girl's pale, beautiful face bending forward a little in the act of listening to him. It was a very different speech from any that he had previously made in Millborough, and it was made from a very different angle. Kemp stood before them to-night as a Catholic among Catholics. He pleaded, fervidly, almost fiercely for the education of Catholic children by Catholic teachers in Catholic schools. He began as usual coldly, dispassionately, outlining his points of

argument, scarcely showing the slightest zeal for his subject. But presently his eyes darkened, his voice abandoned its mellowed softness, his words rang passionately through the hall. There was a tense silence in which only Kemp's voice could be heard. All eyes were turned to him. He looked like a prophet, and his words of warning were almost those of a prophet. He urged the co-operation of all Catholics in a cause that affected them so profoundly and intimately. It was not the moment, he assured them, for indolence, for indifference; they must show themselves strong and united before a peril that attacked the Faith of their children.

The hall was very crowded, for Catholics and Protestants alike had come to hear Kemp. And though the subject was antipathetic to many of those who were not of his religion, yet he held friends and antagonists alike by the sheer force of his burning eloquence. He was as one inspired and few of those who were present ever forgot his words. As he stood there he could see row upon row of eager familiar faces gazing up at him. Temperamentally he was much too sensitive not to know whether he were swaying his audience or not, and to-night he knew that he was so swaying them. He had never had a greater triumph than now, when he reappeared amid the scenes of his old labours with new things to tell, a new message to convey. He was fighting to-night under a new standard, and he had the feeling very strongly that Audrey was standing by his side, stimulating him to fresh endeavour. Lady Ince herself was a little carried away by his words. He looked splendidly handsome, pale, with burning eyes, and the dark hair flowing back from his brow. His fiery eloquence upon a subject so dear to her heart delighted her.

She felt at that moment that she could wish no better fate for Audrey than to be this man's wife.

The meeting was over. The last cheers had died away into silence, the storm of applause had ceased. Adam left the platform and came up to the gallery where Lady Ince and Audrey were sitting alone. His eyes were still very bright; he had an exalted look that neither of them ever forgot.

"You were splendid," said Lady Ince with a genuine sincerity that touched him, "under your new standard."

Adam smiled. "I'm so glad you approved."

He went up to Audrey and took both her hands in his.

"I loved to feel you were there listening," he said, "it helped me more than I can say. I felt you were praying—"

"Yes, I was," said Audrey, trembling.

"We must be going," said Lady Ince. She moved towards the door, and went into the passage beyond, leaving them for a moment alone together. In that moment Kemp put out his arms and strained Audrey to his heart. She had never before had the feeling that she was so completely his. His . . . and unafraid of what the nebulous future might hold. For the first time too she felt that any sacrifice she might be called upon to make would be a thousand times worth while. She lifted up her face and surrendered herself to his kiss.

"My beloved," he whispered.

On the way home Audrey was very silent. She sat there immersed in thought—in those passionate memories which the day had held for her. The day that had put an end so wonderfully to all her doubts and fears, and swept them out of sight, as it seemed forever. Not until now did she realize

how close she had come to accepting the "second best" in the person of Myles Dorling, a man of her own world and of her own Faith, and who truly and devotedly loved her. But she had not loved him, had felt for him indeed nothing beyond a weak grateful liking. With Kemp it was different. He had power to touch her very heart, to make her life seem a more vivid and vital thing. There was nothing calm and tranquil about him. He was "ever a fighter," and he seemed to have fought his way through all obstacles to win her. At the last her surrender had seemed a perfectly easy, simple, inevitable thing. With his arms about her she had felt like a homing bird. It was even with a certain joy that she could think of those sacrifices of worldly position and fortune which for his sake she would be compelled to offer. It seemed to her that she would give royally to receive such joy as that day had bestowed upon her.

As they were nearing Abbot's End Lady Ince spoke for the first time.

"He has found his way at last," she said. "It has always seemed to me that nothing is worth fighting for except one's Faith. It is the only thing worth living for and working for and dying for. I am so glad he has come to see it too."

Audrey put out her hand and touched Lady Ince's.

"Then you think I'm doing right? You don't blame me?"

"No, I don't blame you. It's through you I think that he's come back to his Faith. You can help him—encourage him—love him. He isn't any longer the Ishmael with his hand against every man whom we once knew. I think you've a great vocation before you. . . ."

"We love each other," said Audrey softly. She had tasted the bitter waters of separation that can

so truly test the sincerity, the enduring quality of love.

"I hope you will be married very soon," said Lady Ince. "If Mrs. Corby doesn't care to have it from her house you can have the wedding from mine. I think the sooner it takes place the better. There is bound to be so much disagreeable discussion. Keep it all as quiet as possible." . . . She looked wistfully at Audrey. She wished that it had been possible to keep the news from Hubert until after the ceremony. He would do his best to put a stop to it, and from a worldly point of view he had of course every right to interfere.

"Adam was splendid to-night," said Audrey suddenly.

"Yes—he seems to me quite inspired. And the Church needs lay help more than ever now. The priests' hands are over-full, and they want strong, brilliant young men to aid them."

They entered the house. It was nearly midnight, and Abbot's End was hushed into silence. At the door of her bedroom Lady Ince paused to kiss Audrey. Then she went down the long passage and entered a little tribune that faced the altar of her chapel. She genuflected and knelt down. All her prayers that night were for Audrey and Kemp. It was a tremendous thing—this linking of two human destinies. But she had no fear for Audrey now. The girl had chosen her path with full knowledge of all its difficulties. She had youth and courage and faith to help her.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FINAL PAYMENT

ADAM KEMP was only able to spend a few minutes at Abbot's End on the following day, for just before starting he received a telegram from Jane begging him to return to London as she was not very well. It was unlike Jane to show even this much of exigence, and the message aroused a vague anxiety in his heart. Perhaps Todd, recently released from prison, had commenced his old appeals for money, accompanied by threats that might well alarm a younger and stronger woman than Jane. Adam had realized that Jane had never been quite the same since Rachel's death. She had felt it very much, and something of her old dominating manner had slipped from her. She was weaker physically and much more amenable. Adam had a new hope that she might now listen to his entreaties to leave the Bow Road. He longed to establish her in a country cottage, not too far from his own home when he and Audrey had settled down.

For whatever reason she had sent the telegram—an almost unheard-of piece of extravagance on her part—Adam could not but feel a real anxiety about her. It made him resolve to cut short his visit to Abbot's End and go up to London by the earliest possible train. But he must see Audrey just this once more before leaving, he told himself. It had been wonderful last night. . . . He had not slept for thinking of her. He would even have grudged those hours to sleep. . . .

Audrey was alone when he came into the room. She approached him timidly.

"I'm afraid I'm a little early," he said, "but I've had a most unexpected summons to London. Jane

isn't well—she wants me. And I feel she must want me very much to call me back like this."

"Of course you must go," said Audrey quietly.

Kemp felt oddly nervous in her presence to-day. A feeling of his own unworthiness, coupled with a haunting fear that when the first glamour of love had passed she would the more readily discern it, possessed him. It was now nearly a year since he had first seen her, and as he now told himself, first loved her. She seemed to him even more beautiful to-day than she had done then, when as Tressider's sister she had first received him at Millborough Hall.

"You are not repenting?" he said at last, his eyes feverishly seeking for some subtle evidence of the change he so feared.

Audrey laughed.

"How could I repent? Oh, you *must* believe that I'm happy. . . ."

Guessing at his fears, she tried to subdue them.

"It's because I'm not worthy to touch your hand," he said, looking down at her with an expression in his eyes that she never forgot.

"You musn't think that. Last night—you made me feel unworthy. . . . I feel you want someone more clever, more brilliant, to help you."

"What does Lady Ince think of it all?" he inquired.

"She's very kind, very sympathetic. I knew she would be. She says we can be married from her house."

"Does she really?" His brow grew smooth. "And about our marriage, Audrey. We've waited a long time as it is for each other, haven't we? You won't ask me to wait very much longer, will you?" There was an appealing, humble look in his face that touched her.

"Lady Ince thinks too that we ought to be married soon. She says there is bound to be so much disagreeable discussion. . . ."

He was relieved to find that he had at least one ardent champion. He had feared that Lady Ince's old and inexplicable friendship for Hubert Tressider might militate now against her instinct to help them.

"Must you tell your brother?" he asked. He was afraid of Hubert now—of his power over Audrey. In the old days he had never feared him, had felt only hatred and contempt for him.

"I think he will have to know," said Audrey.

Kemp took her hand in his.

"Don't let him separate us," he said passionately.

"Oh, you mustn't be afraid of that now." She could have reassured him in words that would leave no further room for doubt in his mind, but a certain timidity held her back. She felt that only when she was his wife could she really dare to tell him of the strength and reality of the devotion he had aroused in her heart. A devotion that she felt could never diminish while life lasted. . . .

Kemp looked at the clock. "I ought to be going. I mustn't really miss this train. . . . Jane may be worse than she says,"

"I wish you were not obliged to go," said Audrey. Now that the parting was drawing very near it filled her heart with a little dread.

"Darling—I shall come back very soon. Perhaps to-morrow if I can leave Jane. I haven't been a very attentive brother lately, I'm afraid."

The Bow Road and all that it stood for seemed hopelessly anomalous at that moment, yet it fettered his feet with chains of lead, demanding even the sacrifice of her wishes. She did not want him to go, and yet he was obliged to leave her. He could not

ignore Jane's message. Very strong is the tie of blood, terrible though its fetters often are.

He bent down and kissed her. "Dear," he said, "it's the worst and the best of it that even for you I can't put these things on one side."

"I should never want you do that. I want to share all your life, not only a little smooth bit of it." She was so little worldly where her love for him was concerned that it had already more than once surprised him. Was she really ignorant of or simply indifferent to the things she was going so willingly to forfeit?

"You must tell Jane about me," she said, "and perhaps one day she'll let you bring me to see her. I do want to see your old home, Adam, the place where you lived as a little boy."

"Where I was cold and hungry and often miserable?" he said. A kind of bitter smile lit up his face.

"Yes—I shall try to picture you there," she assured him.

She looked up very happily then into his face, her own all soft and glowing. She was often so childlike; in his hands indeed she was almost a child.

"Oh, Audrey," he said, "tell me that I'm not doing you a great wrong!"

"When you've given me this happiness?" She lifted her face and he bent down and kissed her lips, satisfied perhaps for the first time that she did really love him in spite of all things.

"You mustn't ever doubt me again," she whispered, "for I love you, Adam. . . ."

And with those words echoing in his ears Kemp left her.

He had not replied to Jane's telegram, but he knew that she would be expecting him. It was already dark, for the autumn day had closed in

early, when he emerged from the station of St. Mary's, Whitechapel, and walked eastward with his face set towards the Bow Road. It was not a very great distance to walk, but he had left the train a little sooner than was actually necessary because he had such a fierce longing for fresh air. The street was very crowded, and already the booths were illuminated with flaring naphtha lights that cast a glowing but unsteady flame over the faces of the vendors who stood there, uttering their raucous cries. Little crowds of intending purchasers were already gathering, fingering perhaps the amorphous pieces of meat, the sodden fruit, the steaming hot chestnuts, that were being offered for sale. Great drays thundered over the cobbled streets, the scarlet of a motor-omnibus flashed out for a second before the lumbering vehicle resumed its journey; now and then a private car slipped past going towards the West End. The roar of the crowded street was in Adam's ears; its sounds and sights and odours, familiar to him from childhood, assailed his senses. He had the old feeling that these were fierce malevolent things, bent on separating him from his beloved. . . . Yet Audrey had asked him to bring her here. . . . How should he ever dare do that? What place had she among these scenes? Nevertheless, she had asked for a share in his life; she had not wanted only the little smooth bit that he wished to give her. . . . He saw her clearly then, a brave soul, unafraid . . . made strong by love. . . .

As he drew near the house he saw rather to his astonishment that the upper window was darkened. Jane nearly always sat in that room, and even if she had been quite well again she would have returned from work at that hour, would have had her lamp trimmed and lighted. He could picture her sewing, or perhaps preparing the evening meal in readiness

for him. He went up to the door, and a second surprise awaited him. It yielded to his touch. Jane must have forgotten to lock it. This struck him as the more extraordinary because since Todd's release from prison she had revealed herself as unusually nervous, and had been extremely particular always to see that the front door was properly secured. Adam pushed the door open and entered the narrow passage, now in darkness except for the wan light shed by the street lamp a few yards away.

He switched on a little electric torch which he always carried, and closed the door. The tiny point of glow-worm-like light scarcely relieved the darkness of the scene, and he groped his way uncertainly towards the stairs. They were steep and narrow, and he remembered rather inconsequently how difficult it had been to carry Rachel down them when she left home last spring. Then the silence of the house suddenly struck him as unnatural. Where was Jane? . . .

He found his way into the kitchen and striking a match he lit the lamp which was standing in its usual place on the table. The fire was out, and everything revealed a condition of meticulous neatness. On the table there was a letter. More puzzled than ever he picked it up, and tore open the envelop. The writing, hurried and straggling, belonged to Jane.

"Dear Addie," it ran, "I'm not sure if you will get my telegram in time to stop your coming home to-morrow, so I shall leave this letter in case you come. I am going down to Cornwall with Jim to see Rachie's grave. Poor Todd came last night and said he wanted to go there, and he'd meet me at Paddington and if I wasn't there he would follow by a later train. So I thought you would stay perhaps a little longer at Millborough. Todd is changed and very penitent, and I want to help him

for Rachel's sake. Your affectionate sister, Jane."

Adam dropped the letter. What did it mean? Jane had certainly sent him a telegram, not indeed to tell him that she was going to Cornwall, and that he had better arrange to remain at Millborough, but on the contrary to urge him to return home as she was ill. The discrepancy between the two messages filled him first with an angry irritation and then with a kind of anxious foreboding. What did it mean? He looked round the little room. It was an almost unprecedented thing for Jane to leave home under any pretext whatsoever. And that she should have yielded to the sentimental entreaties of Jim Todd did nothing to allay his anxiety. It was a trap, he told himself with dismayed indignation, skilfully laid and baited by Todd. Its first and perhaps its principal effect had been to snatch from him those hours of intimate and delicious happiness which he had promised himself at Abbot's End today. He had cut short his new-found joy to return to Jane, because he genuinely believed her to be ill and in need of him. Now from her own showing he saw that she must have intended to send him a message of very different purport. She had gone to Cornwall . . . with Todd. . . .

The little room had become suddenly almost unbearably stuffy and airless. He went to the window and threw it open, looking down mechanically into the street. A man stood slouching against the railings, and in that single glimpse he had of him he felt convinced that it was Jim Todd himself. He did not know why but the conviction increased a sense of keen anxiety that had taken possession of him and which had now assumed almost the proportions of a definite presentiment of proximate evil.

He tried to shake off these thoughts. If that were really Todd—Todd who according to his own showing should now have been at Trevore with

Jane—he ought at once to go downstairs and lock the front door. He had left it on the latch when he entered the house, and he did not wish at that moment to have any fresh altercation with his brother-in-law. But the whole thing was extremely mysterious, and he felt for the first time an acute anxiety for Jane's safety. He would go out and send her a telegram this very evening, prepaying the reply, and asking her if she had arrived safely at her journey's end. His nerves were on edge, and to quiet them he resolved upon immediate action. It was no good standing here, wondering what had happened. . . .

Adam switched on his little torch, extinguished the lamp, and went out of the room. He groped his way to the staircase and began to descend it cautiously. Half way down there was a little landing and as he approached it he became aware of the proximity of some dark and solid substance leaning against the wall. A man hurled himself out of the shadows and fell violently against him. Adam, taken by surprise almost lost his footing, the force of the sudden impact made him breathless, he leaned against the wall. He was still holding the torch in his hand, and it revealed to him the revengeful purple face of Jim Todd, standing triumphantly before him. So it had been a lie after all. He had never gone, had never intended to go, to Trevore with Jane. He must have falsified the telegram to lure Adam hither alone.

There was a crash then that seemed to split the darkness with sound and flame. Adam staggered, aware that he had received a fierce blow in the chest, yet still ignorant as to the nature of that blow. He was slipping, slipping, but he caught at the rickety banister and clung to it in desperation. . . .

The light, which before had seemed to him so insufficient and so unevenly distributed, was now

spreading in a kind of dusky radiance, illuminating everything, even the strange and distorted features of Todd who stood so unpleasantly close to him. Adam was conscious that Todd was staring at him with bloodshot eyes. The torch dropped from his hand and lay upon the ground like a tiny fallen star. The sound of many waters surged in his ears, confusing and bewildering him, and the light that had once seemed so imperfect began to dazzle him. He had an overpowering sense of pain and fatigue. He saw oddly enough the big dining-room at Abbot's End, the white table-cloth, the shining silver, the flowers, the glitter of glass. He saw Audrey sitting opposite to him as she had done on Christmas Eve. Her dark eyes seemed to be looking into his with a kind of sad wonder. Out of the confusion memory produced an absurd echo of Lord Wanford's voice: *"Even the venue of the final payment is curiously uncertain. . . ."* The venue of the final payment? It was unlikely that anyone should know that, any more than that they should know the price they would have to pay. . . . The light and sound had faded now, and he was conscious only of an immeasurable loneliness wherein as it seemed no one could approach him. He realized that he was alone and perhaps dying, and that Audrey was very far from him and also utterly ignorant of his sufferings. "Audrey . . . my beloved . . . Audrey," he murmured, and tried to hold out his hands that now for the first time refused to obey the dictates of his brain. They were nerveless impotent things.

Yet he was so little conscious of dying that when at last he was able with a supreme effort to put up his hand to his heart he was astonished to find that it touched something warm and liquid and sticky. A curious faintness came over him . . . he clutched at the air . . . he tried to struggle, to ward off

something that seemed to be coming close to him with malevolent intent. Words rose to his lips and he uttered them thickly, incoherently. . . . *"Sancta Maria, Mater Dei . . . ora pro nobis . . . nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. . . ."* Then he fell face downwards, his body on the landing, his face and neck on the stairs, and lay there quite still with his arms stretched out before him. . . .

Todd stole swiftly downstairs. How easily Adam had fallen into the trap. No one would be likely to enter the house to-night, since Jane was safely away at Trevore, and Adam would lie there, perhaps for several days, before his body was discovered. When he reached the door Todd paused and listened intently. All was perfectly still. The old house was guarding its secret, no betraying sound broke the silence to call attention to the crime that had just been perpetrated.

Todd opened the door and then closed it softly after him, locking it with an old key of Rachel's. Outside it was very dark, for the night had become wet and stormy, and already the rain was falling heavily. There were few passers-by and even the traffic in the street seemed to have diminished a little. Yonder lay the docks and Todd, on leaving the house, headed straight for the river. He had worked as a dock-labourer since his boyhood, and he knew every stone and byway, the secret places, the corners where a criminal might safely hide. An out-going vessel was a safe asylum for a man who only wanted passionately to be lost amid the world's flotsam and jetsam. And the fear of discovery which now seemed to accompany him like a grim phantom would surely diminish when he was safely on the high seas. . . . He passed unnoticed down the street. . . .

THE END.

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